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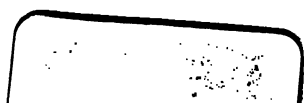
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Susan H. Street -

March - 1911 -

had took .

HALF LOAVES

HALF LOAVES

A Story

BY

HELEN MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "HOUSES OF GLASS"

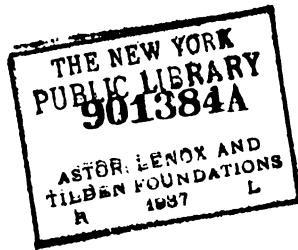


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PART ONE

*After what manner will you seek for that which
you do not know at all?*

MENO, 80.

HALF LOAVES

I

SUDDENLY, all in one ridiculous and tragic little moment, she, Florida Marvin, knew that she could not, absolutely could not, endure it any longer.

She was standing there by the tea-table in the very beautiful Haunt's Manor drawing-room, holding out a Khang-Hsi tea-cup to Evelyn, and saying, "Please, for the duchess," when suddenly something happened to her and she knew. For no special reason, not because Jack, her husband, bent his graceful dark head so devotedly close to another woman; not because her own heavy mourning seemed so desolate and alone in the midst of everybody's gay colors; not because the poet, really a great poet, as it happened, hovered so servilely about the duchess's chair; — not because of any special change in things, not for any one reason more than another, all in that minute she knew that, beyond it, in this way of living, there could be no possible going on. The twenty-five years she had lived through, always in somebody else's arrangement of life, in such very different people's so very different arrangements of it, seemed to her now, suddenly, all to have made toward this one moment, to have led her up to it, and left her in it. It was as if a complication of paths, all ordered and trimmed, some lovely little garden maze such as she had known

in the Italy of her childhood, had brought her out, with the violence of surprise, on blind space and the uttermost edges of her world. She had a sense of catching herself back just in time, and balancing.

It was absurd, she knew, to be standing there holding out a Khang-Hsi tea-cup, with such a moment coming so desperately upon her. The poet, bearded and blushing between the scones and marmalade, was waiting with patient snobbishness for the duchess's cup of tea. Lady Bob, her sister, in a confusion of tossed back veils and loosened motor things, was drawling to Captain Marley in the soft drawl she had adopted as being so effective in England, oblivious of her guests, with Florida, the poet and the duchess waiting. It was absurd, she knew, her decisive moment bursting into all these things that pressed so close around its isolation, yet did not touch her, only left her in the midst of them the more intensely alone. The poet's voice beside her, very small and earnest, persisted, "Dear Lady Bob, the duchess's tea," and Florida turned her remote, tired young gaze upon him wistfully, for she knew he too had dreamed dreams once upon a time. In an Ivory Tower, with no fire, and a cupboard that was bare, a roof that leaked, he had starved and frozen, but had had view upon all the kingdoms of the world. Once, when people were just beginning to "take him up," he had talked to her from that high, still place of vision. She thought of it now, remembering his voice and his eyes. He had had *that*, and he had forsaken it for this.

Not but that "this" was beautiful. Never more fully than in the moment when she had come to the end of it had she been conscious of its beauty. Every beautiful detail of the setting, the stateliness of the

old room, the wealth of color in woodwork and tapestry, the charm of low-toned English lights and shadows, the sense of ease and quiet, of gentleness and long tradition, the special fragrance of the English country house, of pot-pourri and woodfires and chintz, the radiance of the people, every separate item of the beauty that should have made the life beautiful, was more than ever vivid to her in that moment. It was all so perfectly meant for one to be happy in. What visions might not one have seen, what coming true of dreams might there not have been, here? But "here" the things that an Ivory Tower gave shrine to did not matter. Other things mattered so much more. Toiling for bread would not keep one from taking the spirit's things as toiling for the things of these beautiful people did, — these beautiful people, among whom, it seemed, nothing mattered but how fast one could whirl in the dance, how high a value one could get set upon one's self in their world.

A nostalgia, a homesickness for what they all forsook to gain "this" possessed her, a sense of rebellion against this tyranny of being smart, which more even than the tyranny of poverty kept one from the Ivory Tower. Long it had been coming to her, not putting itself into words till now, how she could not any longer stay. Not that she had any place of refuge in the world to turn to unless it were that mood which is as a place secure and apart, that air castle and fortress of the Ivory Tower; not because there was any one waiting for her in that place; not because of any reason she could have given the people at tea, — least of all the man by the crimson dahlias, her husband, where Alicia Temple-Vaulx's gold hair shone out. The going too was all dim and strange; and yet for what else but just that,

just some such going, had the whirl through the planned paths of the maze, all along, up to this moment, led her? Now, as she balanced, tiptoe, on the very edge, she wondered, and there stirred in her heart and rose out of it, all duskily, memories of the various paths she had traveled to reach this moment of decision. As she looked back, where Jack had been with her, there loomed and darkened only griefs, and from where she had gone alone there glimmered strange lights, will-of-the-wisps or stars, she did not know.

With the tea-cup still in her hand, she looked past Jack and Alicia in their corner to the west window. It framed a picture of lawn and clipped yew tree in the rare autumn sunset, and there came to her swift homesick memories for the time when a little long-legged girl with a close-cropped head would have taken her bread and jam out alone there through the tall window into the sunset, perfectly happy because the red light was beautiful, and the smoky smell of autumn very good. There were crimson dahlias, too, she might gather down at the bottom of the garden. Then nothing would have mattered for her but the ecstasy there was for her in these things, and the mood of them would have been her home more than any house, to be reached without trouble of time or space, as in the legends her old Italian nurse used to tell her of saints whose souls in a moment loosed their chains and passed from dungeons into high and heavenly places. For her there was no loosing of the intangible chains which held her; for so long nothing had mattered to her but the people who mattered to Jack. She had for so long a time been standing by a tea-table watching Jack, as he gave the only thing in heaven or earth she wanted to some Alicia; — watching and holding a tea-cup, when she

might have been away out of the window and treading red sunsets.

And now she would go. It seemed to her that she shut her eyes and stepped, and everything was left far behind. The great poet was still saying, "Oh, my dear Lady Bob" — and Evelyn was just turning to notice — saintly-faced Evelyn, who could hurt people so. From a long way off Florida seemed to be looking back at it all, and only remembering it now. The fine old room, where her brother-in-law's ancestors gazed down from the walls at her sister's guests, all, ancestors and guests, of the most "desirable" sort, the glint of gold in the bookbindings, the echoing lights in the mirror, Alicia's hair in the dim corner, the silver tea-things on the table, the glimmering stuff of somebody's tea-gown trailing by, even as she looked, all seemed matters not of the present moment but of memory, the half-forgotten image of a certain tea-time when all these people became, suddenly and for no special reason, unreal and unimportant to her, and Jack, her husband, of them all the most remote.

The great poet, strong in faith, labored on. "If you please, Lady Bob, I am so grieved to interrupt you, but perhaps you don't quite realize, do you see, dear Lady Bob, it's for the duchess"; — while Evelyn, over her shoulder, was noticing at last: "Who's that foh, Flori? The duchess? How does she take it? I cehtenly fohget. Was it sugar and no cream, or cream and no sugar?" — It was only a little thing, but in this life Florida had once been made unhappy out of all proportion by this darky drawl of Evelyn's. They had never really lived on their grandfather's plantation in the South. Even their mother had lived there only as a girl, and had certainly never talked like the blacks. It was only

that Evelyn found that the Southern pose "caught on," had taken it as one of the tricks of the trade. To Florida it expressed by its very affectation and effort the strain of a world where one did things because they "caught on," and somehow, more than important things, seemed to emphasize the distance she and her sister had fallen apart. It made her the more lonely now, and yet it did n't matter. Nothing mattered now.

She looked over at Jack and Alicia, and even that did not matter; there was, as these people of the dance counted things, so really little in it, only his thought and time, and his special peculiar sweetness. She knew "that sort of thing," what it meant, with him, very well. She had had seven years of learning it. There had been so many Alicias, and with each one there had been "so little in it," — only the little that she herself desperately wanted.

The present, particular Alicia was scarcely eighteen, and very sweet and pretty. Florida was sorry for her. Looking across now to the little flower face lifted to Jack's dark nervous profile, so American and quick among these English faces, she saw the trouble in it. The girl did not realize, of this, her first grown-up attention, how really little it signified. Her eyes were frightened, Florida had sometimes fancied, when they looked up to Jack. Yet she always managed, too, in shy little ways, to be where he could find her, and watched when he talked to other women. Just now, Florida saw, Jack was reaching over for another cushion, and tucked it in, a dull green cushion, with infinite care, behind the gold head. Florida knew so well just how "sweet" his smile would be as he bent over Alicia and asked if she were "comfy."

She handed the duchess's tea-cup to Evelyn quite

savagely and said: "Both cream and sugar, please, in the most enormous quantities."

"But oh," burst forth the poet, "my dear Mrs. Marvin, I beg your pardon, but you are quite wrong! The duchess takes neither cream nor sugar, indeed not. A bit of lemon only, Lady Bob, and a mere dash, a soupçon, of rum, do you see?"

"Oh, don't expect her to see!" Florida cried to him; "that's too much, you know. Let's get the poor old soul her tea somehow, and be done with it."

It must have been quite dreadful for the poet, what followed. Florida really pitied the distress and confusion of his face as the duchess's queer little laugh rang out behind them, and they knew that she had heard.

The duchess had a little sad old laugh, that never seemed to belong with the wonderful rest of her. Often it had caught Florida's ear and made her stop and turn to look at the little great lady, always expecting to see some one she would be somehow sorry for, and could feel gently toward, but always to find, instead of some "poor old soul," the smartest of figures in smart clothes. She turned now to a smart little dress of tan leather, a smart little tan leather hat, and the very smartest way of its all being put on.

"A poor old soul," said the duchess quizzically. "So that's what I am, is it?" She came quite close to Florida, looking up at her, screwing up her little old eyes, which Florida, looking into them now for the first time, saw belonged with the laugh. "A poor old soul," repeated the duchess, thinking it over. Florida stood looking at her. Usually she could not help blushing and dropping her long lashes when people looked at her as long as this, but somehow it was quite easy now to face the duchess. She was

conscious of the poet's standing awkwardly by, quite miserable at such a frightful contretemps, and Evelyn actually raising an annoyed eyebrow; but between herself and the duchess the thing was not uncomfortable at all. She had indeed in some odd way a notion that the duchess was glad she had said it, had found an opening she'd been waiting for. It was as if the duchess's eyes were asking if she knew the truth she was telling in those words, if she used them because she knew, if she had been watching, if she had seen. A notion came to her that the duchess wanted her to have seen, that the old eyes seemed to tell her to look, to read between the lines of powder and rouge, that there was, for all the smartness, something one could be, even if one were contemptuous of it, sorry for.

"I wonder," mused the duchess aloud, watching her, "did you know what you were saying?" — in the tone of one who makes an opening, and says, "Tell me more." It was as if she beckoned Florida to some place of understanding. There came to the girl, as she stood there meeting the old woman's painted eyes, a sense of sympathy, distinct as a touch. She saw the duchess as indeed a "poor old soul," who had lived through things, to whom one could go and tell brokenly the little things that made life, to whom she could have told, for instance, — and it would have helped so, — what this day meant to her. If only she could talk to some one like this who would care a little, just put things into the relief of words, perhaps she could bear things and go on.

If she could tell some one what it meant to her that just a year ago to-day, at tea-time, there had been a little white cake, with five lighted candles, placed very proudly in a wreath of white roses on a certain nursery table. If she could just talk to some one who

cared a little, about her baby, with the poor little back, that never would have been straight, who could n't manage to hold the least of the toys she'd heaped that day a year ago before him. It seemed to her that the duchess would not say, as they all did, as Jack did, that for such a poor little baby "it had been much better." The duchess would not have thought it absurd of her, as, it seemed, they all thought, to wear such mourning. Even to-day Jack had told her that, and she had not reminded him what day it was. "It's absurd," he had said; "everybody knows it is n't as if he'd been like other children. And black is so unbecoming to you." She had said: "One has Alicia Temple-Vaulx to look at, in all the colors," and he had flung out at her: "Well! Suppose it were another sort of woman, suppose I did things other men do," — and she had besought him: "Oh, *won't* you see? It does n't matter what sort of woman it is; it really does n't matter, once you've given her your — *your caring*. It's your *caring*." — "Don't be such a little fool," he had said. But she *was* a little fool. —

If she could have said to the duchess: "Don't you see why I can't go back to America, to New York, to that house, to that life of crowds — when he does n't care?" — if she could have told of how she'd left the baby time and time again, crying for her, to go where Jack went, keeping up, keeping up, while the sound of the poor little sobbing haunted her in the music of bright rooms; if she could have told of that last time, when she ran down the stairs to where Jack waited for her and called to her impatiently to come; if she could have talked of these things to-day with some one who cared, what would it not have meant to her! — They had been off yachting down the coast of her own Florida with a lot of people, — and

an Alicia, — and telegrams had reached them only afterwards, so that they got home too late to find it of any use ever any more going up to the nursery. She wanted to say to the duchess: "Oh, if only I'd been there —" She wanted to say: "If only Jack had cared. He need n't understand, if only he had cared." She took a step toward the duchess, and would have put her two hands out with quick impulse.

But the poet came, he apparently thought, to the rescue, interposing to save the "situation" with ready tact: "Now, dear duchess, what offers the tea-table to tempt our fancy?"

"Probably nothing," said the duchess, turning from Florida to inspect it. "No, not those. I never eat those. No, nor that; not when it's cut that way. Oh, no, I could n't touch them, with pink on top. What else have they? No, I detest that. Thanks, Lady Bob, but I could n't think of it. There seems to be nothing here one can eat."

"I'm too sorry," said Evelyn, pouring cream into the duchess's cup in spite of valiant continued remonstrances from the poet, and drawling: "All you men are jes alike," to Captain Marley.

"Can't you stop her?" appealed the duchess to Florida.

Florida made an attempt at it. "Captain Marley, *you* tell her," she experimented.

"Yes, if you put it that way, you'll make them shy," the duchess commented. She raised her lorgnon to look at the two, and the poet said coily:

"You're such a blague, dear duchess."

"Look at him," said the duchess, transferring her stare to the poet. "Is n't he too deliciously well trained? And when one thinks of the wild, wicked things he used to write! You know that one all about red, and that too fearfully improper one of the tree?"

— I say, is your sister madly in love with that object of a man there? ”

“ Madly,” said Florida; “ one of those great loves, do you see? ”

“ How many of them has she got? ” asked the duchess, staring at Evelyn. “ You ’re a frightful success, are n’t you, Lady Bob, with all those objects of men in love with you, and your poor husband more than any of ’em. So clever of you. Do you study her methods? ” she asked of Florida.

“ Don’t you go for to put ideas in that child’s head, duchess,” broke in Evelyn, giving her the tea.

But the duchess went on suddenly to Florida. “ I ’ll tell you something, Mrs. Marvin. It may help you, and I ’d like to help you. I ’ve been watching you these days here, because you interest me, do you see, you really do. Now listen.” She waved her teaspoon in the air with emphasis. “ If ever any one wants a man to be in love with them, don’t give him much. Give him half a loaf, and make him go down on his knees begging for it, do you see? And I ’ll tell you another thing. If ever anybody wants to be given all there is of love — and there are people — ” She stopped short, and in the perceptible pause she seemed to change, and be not any more the purposely dreadful old duchess. “ There *are* people, you know, who want the fullness of giving and receiving, and live all their lives imagining it, ‘ making believe,’ as children say; who spend their souls, and wear themselves out trying to make life conform to their dream. But they ’re so wrong, those people, Mrs. Marvin. You funny alien little thing, what are you thinking of? Don’t you know that things are what they are, that one *must* be what one must? ”

Florida stood there, tall and slim, her hands clasped before her, white against her black dress, aloof and

"alien," as the duchess had said. She stood there, looking at the duchess out of smoke-gray, smoldering eyes.

"What are you thinking of?" asked the duchess.

"Oh, of nothing," Florida said, spreading out her hands with an empty little gesture; and all her desolateness seemed to gather in the words she did not cry out. In truth she was thinking that if Jack had not been sometimes so adorable, if there were not minutes which she could not help imagining each time would last on always, it would all have been less cruel. If only he had n't given her the hope each time that next time might be different. She was thinking, as she answered that she thought of nothing, that hope was of all things the cruelest thing in the world, that hope was indeed the half loaf that kept one hungry and a beggar. She was thinking when she answered to the duchess that she thought of nothing, that she must throw away even her half loaf, must free her hands, and escape away from all this mood and world, and from the one person's withholding. As she said, "Oh, of nothing," she wanted to ask the duchess how she too had kept it up for all the years of her life? She wanted to ask, of this poor old soul who knew, if there were anything in any of it that made it worth while, when nobody cared. It all came back helplessly to that: if only he had cared. "I'd go on forever," she wanted to say to the duchess, "keeping up with him, if only he cared." She wanted to say that, however things had been, she was going away just, first and last, because he did not care. It was from that, from his not caring, that she had turned her face already and was setting forth for the Ivory Tower, — that refuge from the things that bewilder and weary and fail, that tower which reached up into the mountain tops and stars, that upper chamber whose case-

ments opened to the music of the spheres. She wanted to ask — passionately, it mattered so — what other home but that, after all, had one? She wanted to say it all over, how that which one earns by years one spends in an hour; how faith gropes in the dusk of the gods, and love gives too much and asks too much, wearing itself out so. And she wanted to tell, too, in sheer need of hearing some one say it, how quietly all the while, for any one who could take of them, each day brought exquisitely new lights and shadows, new colors on forest ways and city streets, quite new surprises day after day. She wanted to say to the duchess: "Mayn't one go to all that if one leaves 'this,' and throws the half loaf down?" Among all the people there at tea, with the duchess's eyes speaking to hers and making hers speak, she stood looking away to where, above all the noise and glare and dust of the dance, high apart and secure, there was the Ivory Tower. She almost said to the duchess: "You know, don't you?" But she said aloud, though not to the duchess at all: "No, one must throw the half loaf quite away."

"Willful waste," playfully put in the poet, deciding, upon mature consideration, that it was well to treat the whole occurrence in the nature of a jest. "Willful waste."

"Yes," the duchess said, "some people do, and then they go round crying about no bread. 'If they can't eat bread, why don't they have cake?' you know, as what's her name said. But it does n't do."

"It's taking the wrong things," went on Florida, still thinking aloud; "it's that everybody here takes the wrong things to make up with. Here, somehow, it seems there are nothing but all the wrong things for one to take." She stopped, and the something she was always to remember looked at her plainly then

out of the duchess's eyes. "Poor little child," said the old woman, very real for all the clothes and paint. "Little child, don't, in looking for things too far, pass by things that may be right too. You may only know it when it is too late."

If she had left that for the last word, Florida thought afterwards, it might have told on things that were to come; but she did not. She drew away again, very far. Just the smart clothes were left standing there, with no poor old soul belonging to them. It was as if the whirl of the dance already were carrying past her the little great Duchess of Carstairs, who just carelessly, detestably, added in going: "The hungry look is becoming to your queer little face, let me tell you, Mrs. Marvin. Mind, you could make up for lots of things, if you needed to, by using just that for a pose, like your sister's being so darkey. Look hunger at the people and they 'd give you cake. Poet, Mrs. Marvin's hungry. And I want more tea. Tell Lady Bob, and fetch me something or other to eat, — some of these fearfully American little cakes, and a scone, if they are at all hot." Then she said to Florida: "Run away, child, your eyes make me think of things I don't want to think of."

She reached up and patted Florida's cheek with her lorgnon. They had been looking at each other for perhaps ten minutes, and Florida was to remember those ten minutes for a long time. The duchess tapped her cheek with the lorgnon and said, "Go away, child," and turned to the tea-table.

Florida went toward the window that opened like a door to the sunset. She passed Jack and Alicia in their darkening corner. He was trying to make Alicia promise not to ride somebody's horse to-morrow, — it was a brute, he was saying; he'd be worried every minute; and he did not look up at Florida as

she passed. Alicia lifted forget-me-not blue eyes to her, guiltily, and after all it must be a little dreadful to think the husband of one's best new friend quite frightfully in love with one, when one has n't yet learned how properly to manage such things. Florida wanted to say to this little lady of her husband's latest fancy: "Don't worry. He has made you just a little silly about him, but another man would have made you far more disastrously so. He's a little silly about you, too, but he'll go back to America and write you a dozen letters, and you'll each find some one else to be silly about."

She wanted to say it in just the tone of one to whom it did n't matter, if she could, but in one instant again the mood changed. She wanted to cry out to Alicia, even if all the room heard: "Oh, just this one day, *this day*, when I've been remembering *so*, you might have left me some thought of his . . ."

She went blindly over to the window and stood there looking out.

II

ONCE, in just such another red autumn sunset, though the Ligurian mountains it had lain upon seemed far now, almost beyond realizing, from the Surrey lawns and park lands, a Florida, aged fifteen, all elbows and eyes and very dirty, for she had been working all day with Bacè in the garden, had sat before the garden house, on the steps of the top terrace, looking away over olive-laden hills, and knew that she had been perfectly happy. She had come back only a few days earlier to the garden house of her dear Coll' Alta. That year, Evelyn, who was now grown up and very pretty, had not been sent there

with her, but was to spend the winter with Mamma in smart places, to make, if possible, on nothing a year, a smart marriage. Evelyn's days of exile to the garden house were over, and Flori, alone with Maria Domenica and Bacè, could be her own little dreamy, lonely, happy, undisturbed self, quite belonging to the strange life that had given so much toward making her what she was.

It was a strange life for two little American girls to have been so, as it were, put down into, though their being so put down into it had come about quite naturally. Everywhere else they had bothered everybody. All Florida's memories, away from the garden house, were of having been a bother. Remembering, afterwards, the rare times when her mother and Evelyn and she went "home" to the shabby old house near Washington Square, where they were reluctantly admitted when there was for the moment not money enough to let them live somewhere else, she was always sorry to have bothered her father at least so much. She thought her father might have liked her if things had been different. As it was all her memories of him were, not of *him*, but of the door she should have passed on tiptoe, the desk with brass knobs of eyes to watch her and claw feet ready to pursue; the books she could not help stealing from the walls of the forbidden "study," despite all threats and punishments, and read hungrily. It was only when they went back to the house after he was dead, when the forbidden room was open to her, and the books were hers (she always wondered why he'd left them to her, and was touched that he had thought of her) that she came to imagine the friendship she might have had with her father had things been different. Why things had not been different she understood long after, coming by chance upon the knowledge of a thing her

mother had done, to him so terrible that after it nothing meant much any more, nothing ever was to him again more than a bother.

Beautiful Mamma, at once indolent and ambitious, brilliant and quite a fool, had *had* to have some sort of world for her footstool, and the world of New York she could not have; there was n't enough money.

The world which Mamma could make a footstool out of was that easily conquered, ever-shifting, unquestioning world of Continental watering places — small cheap rooms in big, costly hotels, beautiful clothes, smart carriages, smart little dinners always in restaurants — nobody of that world seemed ever to have a home — rather high playing at the Casino — there was always a Casino — and never a penny spent without grudging on the two little girls who were such a bother. The father, gentle and courteous, but not by any means to be approached, asked only that they should not be left at home with him, so they bothered Mamma in the big hotels of Paris or Rome, Aix or St. Moritz, or the Lakes, as the season had it. They bothered Mamma's little train of counts and marquises and princes. They bothered the series of governesses and maids who passed through the confusion of their small lives, one after another, till at last came Maria Domenica.

It was at Nice Maria Domenica came to them. Evelyn was fourteen, and so pretty that already people wanted her about and said Mamma looked wonderfully young to have so big a daughter. This indeed was a more serious bother than Mamma could bear. Florida was eleven, and the maid of the moment, next before Maria Domenica, — a grand person, who did Mamma's hair marvelously, — could not endure her. It had come to such a crisis that either the children or the maid must go. Then somebody

suggested Maria Domenica. Somebody had known her as companion for ages to an English lady, one of those dim, unnoticed exiles of health, who cling to life in sunny corners of hotel gardens, and get buried at last in sunny graveyards amongst strangers. Maria Domenica had been truly devoted to her, it seemed, was really a very superior sort of person, — her father had been schoolmaster in a small town up in the Roya Valley, and his father Syndic, and all that sort of thing. Her brother was a flower grower there, with a quite charming house and garden; she herself had taught school in San Remo before she became companion to the English lady, and could be governess and sick-nurse and everything else for a salary which the maid who did hair marvelously would have despised. Moreover the house in the flower garden, well outside the walls of the little old hill-top town, back in some fold of the mountains over the Roya, was a place where two small girls could be much less in the way than in big hotels. It would be such a saving, too; Mamma could buy more dresses and give more dinners, and the hairdressing maid could be kept on; and people would still think Mamma was five and twenty.

So it came about that Evelyn was discontented, and Florida radiantly happy, for long parts in every one of several years, and that influences rather strange, leaving Evelyn untouched, went deep into Florida's making.

She came each year to the old Ligurian garden house, from the world beyond the olive hills, with a happiness so intense as to be almost a pain; but never had she so realized happiness as in the *home-coming* there of the winter when she was fifteen, as in that red sunset, when she sat on the upper terrace and hugged her knees and knew that life was good.

She had been helping Bacè with the November work of the garden. The season was kind that year, and there were beautiful flowers to be gathered and packed, and sent down to Ventimiglia, for shipping to far places. The autumn roses were wonderful, — the safrano and the Marie Vanut and the Paul Narbonan. The upper terraces were deep with their bloom; there were narcissuses, that Florida loved best of all the flowers, frail, white, starry things, utterly sweet; and violets already; heliotrope and carnations filled the air with sweetness and spices; scarlet salvia flamed on the lower terrace beyond the masses of yellow and brown and rusty red chrysanthemums, and the datura hung its trumpets against the garden wall. It was the time of the gathering of the November figs; the fichi Turani and the fichi Turchi were spread out, purple and red, to dry on the graisse under the south wall. The peaches of the Saints were ripe down on the lower terraces, to be picked tomorrow. The smell of the crushed grapes in the wine room under the house came out through the smell of heliotrope and carnations on the terrace.

Maria Domenica was singing in the house, as she moved about getting supper. Florida caught only words here and there of the song, "Amore, amore," trilled over and over, "Addio" and "lontano" and "mai più, mai più," with the throb and quiver all Italian voices have, giving the words something indescribable of heart break. The longing and the sadness of the melody and of the words had curiously to do in Florida's mood with the beauty of the quiet old garden, and of the world of hills beyond, and of the red sunset filling it all. The smell of fresh baked bread came out from the house to the garden, and the smell of the chestnuts drying on the cane hurdles in the kitchen. The little Flori was hungry, and that

also had something to do with the wonderful mood of the moment. She thought of supper and the lamp; the feeling of home that the place had always had for her was strong upon her, sweet with love of little, accustomed, humble things.

The red sunset stained the worn old walls of the house. The shadows were purple under the loggia, and in the purple shadow was a red glow where the firelight shone out from the kitchen. The light was red in the sky, and the hills opened away to it, shadowy, purple fold on fold. The valley was full of purple shadows. Down there the chestnuts were ripe and the little river ran swift and full from the mountain rains. To the east, high on the hill crest, Castel Coll' Alta, with its four great square corner towers, and the town with its massed walls and roofs and its tall campanile, were lifted high above the purple shadow into the sky's light. From the terraced garden Flori looked down on the olive woods below, down the hillside, and watched the shadows mount upon them, watched them go under, as in the depths of some purple tide. Slowly the tide crept up to the foot of the garden. The moss and lichen stained wall, the cypresses of the lower terraces, went under. The tall stone pillar of the well and the long angled pole went under; and then the fruit trees and the rose-bushes, and Flori, and the figs on the graisse, all went under, and the garden house, and the castle-crowned hill, and all the world.

To little Flori that going under in a flood of twilight was like a going down into the depths of some beautiful sadness, the great impersonal sadness, that is the sadness of all the world, of all the things that have been and shall be in the world. As she sat in the grass, hugging her knees, life rose like a twilight, in a dim purple flood, over her too, and its sadness was

somehow the most exquisite part of her happiness of the moment.

The paese bells began to ring, deep-toned and mellow. The sound of them came to Flori, through the distance and the shadows, as through a depth of water, very sweet and strange. It was for the Ave Maria of the evening they rang. The women would leave their water jars at the fountain, and throwing their handkerchiefs over their heads, would run into church for a minute — old Soeu' Teré and snappy little Chichetta and all of them — to say good-night to the Christ in the gilt plaster glory over the altar; the children would stop their games a minute and run in after their mothers, their little wooden shoes clattering up the aisle; the men would talk on, standing about the caffè door. The smell of the church, of years-old incense and candle smoke and prayers, would come drifting out to the piazza under the leather curtain, the mules would be crunching their suppers in their dark holes under the houses, the narrow, deep streets sunk in night already.

Already the wick would be lighted in its glass of oil and water in the little room where Toinetta Ranieri, just fifteen years old, like Flori, lay so ill, and in the half-ruined old pile of the castle, where hunchbacked Gianin, the caretaker, lived alone with the bats and the owls, soon the ghosts would be stirring, a strange company, trailing like mist through the cold stone halls and along the terraces. . . .

Presently sleepy bird notes trilled from the depths of the roses by the vasca. From the house Maria Domenica called: "Signorina, Signorina, come now and have thy supper, I must hurry."

Her voice sounded tired, she had been sitting up for nights with the poor little Ranieri. An idea came to Florida. She herself was old enough, she could be

trusted, she would go to-night and stay with Toinetta. She was afraid, because Toinetta was very ill, and when people in the paese were very ill the ghosts of the lords of the castle came, wrapped in mist, through the poor streets, to wait for them under the windows; but she would go. She shivered a little as she stood up. The mood of a happiness that was the more happy because it was sad, had fallen from her, but as she stood there for a minute before turning to the house, a great love of all these strange tense things gave her promise.

If ever she were unhappy, out in the world that waited for her, she would turn from it, all the unknown of that outside world, and come home here.

III

BUT though she had been unhappy outside in the world from which the olive hills had shut the old, wild garden and her childhood so closely in, had been most unhappy, she had never yet gone back there. The worst of it always had been that, being so unhappy, she yet had never been *unhappy enough* to break through circumstance and go back. She had never been able to give up hope. She had actually envied the women who were unhappy enough, who were able to give up that most cruel thing, hope. With her, one word of his, the least word that was sweet, would bring it back always. There had always been the half loaf. She had heard of women who starved and died, and she, in whom love of living was too cruelly strong for that, had envied them; there were, she knew, women who threw the half loaf down and went away, and she had envied them too, and now she would do as they did. She had done it

already: all in one minute thrown the half loaf away. As she stood in the drawing-room window at Haunts' Manor, a sense of that other sunset was so strong upon her, its slow, dim, soft minutes so flowed, as it were, about her, that she seemed again to be going under, sinking down into that depth of happiness and sadness in Maria Domenica's wilderness of a garden among the olive hills, in the purple tide.

It was through blank spaces, as if from a long way off, that her brother-in-law's voice, striking in strangely enough, came to her: "I say, Flori, why do you stand there starin' out of the window?"

"I'm going," she said vaguely.

"Goin' where?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, just for a walk. Come too, Bob." She turned about to him, and saw the room grown dark and the lamps lighted.

He picked up somebody's red cloak that lay near on a chair and threw it around her shoulders, clumsily, as he did everything. They said he was the ugliest, clumsiest man in England, and called him all sorts of names, with extreme affection, Humps, Bobby Clown, Hatchet Face, the Beast, of course, to Evelyn's beauty,—all because they were fond of him, he knew, and he laughed about it; but he could have told, had he been a man who could tell things, how it was all the sequel to a desolate enough heritage he had entered upon when, as a little boy coming down to dessert with his handsome brothers, something in the way his mother looked at him made him always grow scarlet and stumble. Florida, whose love for her own little boy had been made savagely intense by the way people looked at him or away from him, troubled to think about Bob as nobody else did, and knew, with an understanding that made her draw back sometimes as though from things one was not meant to see,

just why he was rough and a barbarian. It was as if she knew why he went crashing aside, like the Beast, indeed, from Beauty's path out of Evelyn's brilliant way; knew why, when radiant Evelyn had no word for him that was not sharp, or any look that was not dark, he had only a growl for any one who emphasized her unkindness by trying to be kind. Florida knew how, through his poor defense of savagery, a word or a look could hurt him, knew better perhaps than any one had a right to know, and out of her understanding of him she had grown very fond of him, and felt his fondness for her as a strong silent thing she was glad to have. He did not in the least understand her, but he cared about her. She wondered that one could care so much and not understand. It seemed to her now, when he put the red cloak about her shoulders and opened the long window and followed her out into the twilight, as if he must know how far away she had gone already, from him, and from all of "this."

The window opened level with the lawn, and she stepped out into the soft grass and the mist which lay like a white veil over the lawn and the yew trees. Farther on the great oaks stood up out of the mist, darker than the dark sky.

"Anythin' the matter, Flori?" Bob asked.

"No, Bob."

There was n't, any more. The things that had been the matter, the unsure things, the half-given things, she had already, she told herself, passed far away from — and what had they amounted to, after all, when looked back upon from the sense she had come to have of life's greatness? After all, surely it was enough that one loved to live and move and have one's being, in a world where there were misty lawns sweet with clover, and enchanted mountains that had a spell

for one, a draught of Lethe, an ebrezza, a going under in deep tides of ecstasy and melancholy; a world of swaying white narcissus and great dark oak trees, where there opened many roads to one's wandering, whether one were a prince bothered with thrones and crowns, or a poet starving beautifully in an attic, an office clerk with eighteen square inches a day of the sky or a goat-herd to whom it is infinitely given. She might almost have told Bob of it — it amused her to picture his face should she tell it — when he asked her, "Where shall we go, Flori?" slouching along, huge and round-shouldered beside her, through the mist and the twilight.

"I want to smell the fields and the woods," she said.

Beyond the lawns one could make out dimly the higher broken outline of the unkempt lands, here and there a hayrick dark in the darkness, or the roof of some farm cottage. The woods to the right stretched away into the distance that by night is mystery.

"Don't you love it all, Bob?"

"Rather, by Jove."

Neither spoke again till they had passed the gate in the stone wall dividing the park from the unkempt land. Then Bob said: "I say, you *know*, don't you? I'm no good at sayin' things, but don't you know that if ever anythin' were the matter, if ever I could do anythin' — I say, you *do* know?"

"Of course I know," she said.

"If ever there were anythin' that I could do —"

She interrupted him: "You do so much, by just being there, by just letting me feel that whatever happens, you 'll be there."

She knew he would. The little deep growl he gave, having no words, meant all sorts of faithful things. She knew he would be there if ever she needed him.

She only wondered if ever she should need him. To-night, strong in her decision, she felt that she never should need any one again, — unless it were Maria Domenica to bake her bread and pour her wine, and Bacè to bring sheaves of white narcissus in from the garden. The memory of that other sunset was so *with* her, so full of promise, that she wanted to give of it to Bob too, to every one, to have all the world know what happiness there was to turn to. She wanted to talk to him about Maria Domenica and the garden, but he would not have at all understood.

They crossed a pasture and went through woods that smelled of wet tree trunks and fungi and fallen leaves. She wondered if she should look back and think of it in the narcissus garden, and of old Bob, going on and on in the life she would no longer endure. She wished she could make him take of his own woods and fields as she had seized her happiness of the spirit, but he could n't while he wanted of Evelyn. She wished she could make Evelyn take of the things that were flung at her feet, the things other women longed all their lives for. If Bob and Evelyn could have been better in the least for her staying on — but it was of no use; there was nothing she could do, there was nothing even she could say. They tramped on silently through the woods. The woods were all softly astir with the life of their wild things, unseen in the dark, — the drum of a partridge in the undergrowth, the scurry of a rabbit ahead, the starting up of a deer and its leap across the path. After a long while Bob said: "If we turn here, we shall be out on the drive in a minute, and it 'll be easier goin' than the path in the dark."

When they had gone quite a little way, he said: "I shall miss you frightfully, d' y' see? Why do you go back to America? You know you 'll be unhappier

there. Why does Jack want to go? There's nothing to make him, and you dread it. Why do you go?"

"I'm not going," said Florida, and she stopped, at the edge of the drive, to fling out her arms in a mad little gesture, as if she were flinging wide many things. "I'm not going back to America. And I'm not going to starve any more. I'll find something I can make up for myself with. What's that — somebody's shouting — no, singing! Who in the world can it be?"

The voice came to them through the mist, a big rollicking voice that shouted out, the words growing plainer to Bob and Florida as great strides bore down upon them:

"Confound their knavish tricks,
Frustrate their politics,
Dum-dum-ti-dum ti dicks,
God save the King!"

A man came striding toward them out of the mist, looming up big as his voice, swinging his arms as he strode along like a schoolboy.

"Who in the world can it be?" asked Florida, but Bob cried, "It's Illsboro, by Jove!" and "By Jove, it's Bob!" cried the man, upon them in three swings.

IV

THE two men seized each other's hands, and stood shaking each other, and saying, "By Jove!" while Florida, unnoticed by either, stood by laughing.

She had known in an instant who Illsboro was, Bob's best friend, the friend of all his life, so dear as to be scarcely spoken of. She knew they had not met for years, that Illsboro had been living away from the lives of all his people for reasons which other

people, never Bob, had told her of. The story came back to her vividly; it had always, somehow, been rather specially vivid to her. There had always been something of fascination for her in it and in whatever she had heard of Mary Talbot, the half-French, half-Irish beauty, whom London had scarcely known, grown up half in her father's old ruined castle somewhere in the bogs, half in the school of her mother's girlhood, that convent which is gone now from the rue de Varenne; adored by Paris as the Marquise de Gramondin even as her husband, the "gambling Marquis," was detested; yet condemned, when the end of it came, as he was not, despite the evil that blackened him. It had been set down as the end of her story when she and Illsboro passed out of the world one knew, just a step over the line into the world one of course, and very properly, did not know. In the wide dim spaces of that half world they had been lost together for, it must have been, ten years. And this was Illsboro, coming back like a schoolboy home for the holidays, singing, as he strode along, to meet his own people; ten years and the other world were as if they had not been. He at least stepped back over the line into to-day and the world one knew, where Bob watched Evelyn, and Florida "kept up"; where poor old souls must needs be just a putting on of clothes, and life a dance to other people's music; — came back all jubilant and royally young, greeting his best friend with sounding whacks and crying, "By Jove, old man, by Jove!"

"Rippin', by Jove!" said Bob; "old man, I can't believe it."

"Neither can I, by Jove. Just back. Came straight here. Forgot to let you know. Rippin' old walk over from the Park station."

"By Jove!" said Bob again.

"By Jove!" said Illsboro.

"Seemed as if you were dead," said Bob.

"Seemed as if I were," said Illsboro.

They shook each other again and whacked each other, and said "By Jove!" again; and neither of them noticed that Florida had run away.

V

COMING back alone to the house, letting herself in by the unfastened door of the central hall, Florida came upon the little Alicia, sitting disconsolately on the bottom step of the wide, paneled stairs.

Alicia sprang up, as the elder girl closed the door behind her, and stood uncertainly, very shy and sweet. "O Flori, I have been waiting for you so long!"

"What do you want of me?" asked Florida, taking off the red cloak by the door. The strangeness of her mood was, she felt it, like some medium they could not pass through, intangible and invisible and very present there, between her and the girl, who was, she knew, anxious, now it was too late, to come near. Alicia came to her from the stairway. Alicia was part, perhaps she, Florida, had never realized before how great a part, of the "this" she was leaving, — charming as all the rest of it was, sweet to pet and play with, but, no more than the rest of it, a thing to matter now, though it all might have mattered so much. The fire on the deep hearth seemed good to linger by, the doors that opened away from the great hall invited charmingly; the loot of Lord Bob's war-faring ancestors everywhere about the house gave distinction in the midst of the purely English correctness and completeness; green dragon vases from the Pekin Palace held Michaelmas daisies and shaggy yellow

chrysanthemums, and the great bronze Siva sat benevolently by the hearth; there was a curious fragrance as of sandalwood in the English firelight. Florida was almost painfully conscious of the charm of these things, as she flung the red cloak down on a chair with somebody's dogskin gloves and riding crop. She drew the more away from Alicia because she might have been, but was not, so lovely a part of it.

"No, on the whole, I think I'd rather you did n't tell me what you want me for, Alicia," she said.

"Oh, but I must; I simply must, it's so frightful." Alicia was very pretty in the soft light, with her cheeks red and her eyes troubled. "Let me come to your room just for a little, please; it is n't time to dress for dinner, and there's something I must tell you."

"Don't tell me," said Florida; "I know anyway, and it does n't matter."

"Oh, Flori, how do you know?"

Florida laughed. "I knew he would."

"Flori, I'm so ashamed and so unhappy, and it was all my fault."

"Oh, if it had n't been you it would have been somebody else," said Florida. "I tell you, it does n't matter." Then she realized suddenly that for Alicia, young and sweet and not yet used to these things, it did matter; probably no man had ever kissed her before. It all seemed to Florida a rather dreadful pity. There had been one woman, back in the time when things had mattered terribly, of whom now all at once she found herself thinking. She wondered if Alicia might one day be like that other woman; probably yes, all her life such men as Jack would come to make her so. Here ended the first lesson; and it showed Alicia as different from the others here at the beginning.

"Come up to my room with me," she said, "if you want to."

She turned to the stairs, and Alicia followed her.

"You're so awfully good," said the little Alicia as they went up; "you may n't believe it, but I am frightfully fond of you, Florida, much fonder than ever I've been of him, really, underneath. Only I got somehow crazy. You're such a duck, Florida."

Florida opened the door of her room, and Alicia followed her in. It was the room that had been Bob's when he was a boy. It was rough and shabby, and Florida liked to have it. She seemed to belong in it rather than in such a silky room as Evelyn's. Manson, the maid, who always made one think of a neatly rolled little silk umbrella, prune-colored, too nice to be opened in the rain, was putting out the things she intended her mistress to wear down to dinner.

"I won't dress yet, Manson."

"Those wet things, madame —"

"I'll see to them. That's all now, Manson."

"Thank you, madame," said Manson, as she went on putting out the things, the inevitable itself typified in her person and her way of doing it. Florida and Alicia waited, Alicia moving about the room, in and out of the firelight and shadow, talking nervously of anything, Florida sitting silently in the chair she had drawn up to the fire, watching Manson and trying to be amused by her notion that the maid's relentless spreading out of lace petticoats and silk stockings emphasized, as it were, drew a line under, all this life's unbearablenesses. "When she gets to the handkerchief," she thought, watching the good woman, "I shall throw something at her." She asked aloud: "Did you ever forget to put out a handkerchief, Manson?"

"I think not, madame."

"I wish you would, this time."

"Yes, madame." Manson's voice, that of one accustomed to mistresses one called milady, seemed always to express wonder that she remained with this American.

At last she finished. "I will come back at eight, madame. I have not put out the pocket-handkerchief."

Florida sat up straighter in her chair. "Tell me now, Alicia."

Alicia stood against the closed door. It was n't only because her face was pansy-shaped and rose-tinted, and her eyes forget-me-not blue that one looking at Alicia was so apt to think of flowers; it was because of something in herself, for all her life's training, quaintly simple and sweet.

"I'm a little beast," she said, "a little beast, Flori; you'll hate me when you know!"

Florida laughed. "And you want me to know, so that I may hate you?"

"Oh, Flori, I could n't bear to have you hate me, and yet I could n't bear to have you not hate me just because you *did* n't know."

"I'll not hate you, Alicia."

"But it was n't the first time, Florida. There've been several times. The first time I told him to tell you, and to tell you it was all my fault, and that we both were ashamed, and that we would n't ever again. I had n't quite known he'd kiss me, but I'd known that he would follow me out into the garden, and I'd known that I looked nice in the moonlight. I went way down past the peacock cedars."

"You have no right to tell me," said Florida.

"I told Jack I was going to tell you. I've told him so all along, but I said I meant it to-night. And he said he'd never forgive me, and he never

will. And I don't want him to. I don't want him ever to be nice and sweet to me any more. If he were, I might be horrid, like that, again. And so I've told you."

"You might make an awful lot of trouble telling me," said Florida, bending over to untie her shoes, "between Jack and me. You might start trouble you could n't stop."

Alicia choked. "Oh, it's dreadful," she cried, and rubbed her eyes with her little fists like a child.

"Don't cry," said Florida, "it's of no use."

"I know," half sobbed Alicia.

Florida kicked off her shoes and held out her slim feet in their silk-embroidered stockings to the fire. The bottom of her skirt was wet too, and she turned it back and spread it out. Suddenly she seemed to be taking great care of her skirt that it should dry.

"My telling can't hurt Jack," went on Alicia miserably, "for you can't blame him. It was all my fault."

Florida cut her short. "Give me my slippers, will you? They are in the cupboard. The white bedroom ones with the fur. Just throw them over."

Alicia got them for her, and knelt to put them on.

"It's all wrong, everyway," she said.

"If you want to tell me the things that are your fault, — not the things that are Jack's fault, mind, — you may tell me now," said Florida. "Only do sit down. Take that little chair, and don't cry."

Alicia pulled the chair nearer and sat down on it, huddled up in it, her whole attitude expressing misery.

"All of it is my fault, from the beginning. I cried the first time, but I let him hold my hand while I cried. And the next time I would n't speak

to him for days, nearly two days, but I knew that that would only make him want to more. I don't know how I knew, because he was the first man who ever had. Don't you hate me, Florida?"

"Oh, no."

"I hate myself, awfully, awfully. In the beginning I was just pleased that a man should — should make a fuss over me, don't you know? And because he was an older man and married, and everybody said he was so frightfully attractive. It made the other men notice me, you see. And the other women. You know how all the women want him. I think it was because of the other women that I liked it, Flori. Don't you know?"

"Oh, yes, I know."

"So at first it was more because of other people than because of Jack. He fussed over me, and that made other people fuss over me, and that made me think I must be attractive. And you know how, if you think you're attractive, just that makes you *be* attractive, unless you're a perfect horror? It makes you dare to laugh and talk and walk across rooms and all, don't you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Florida again, as Alicia paused, looking for help to her.

"I'd always been so shy," went on Alicia, "and mother had always said I'd never be a success. And then when he left other women to be with me, and wanted always to be with me, as if he liked me a lot, I could n't help trying to make him like me more. And I thought that having a man like Jack devoted to me might make me a success, and that *then* mother would see. So I tried. Only I—I got rather crazy about him, Flori. Flori, I'm afraid I got very crazy about him. That was my fault too. I let myself, I almost *made* myself, in the beginning,

You know how it is. If you are n't crazy a little about a man, I mean the sort of man Jack is, who's used to it from women, he's apt not to bother about you. What are you laughing at, Florida?"

"It's so funny. Can't you see how funny it is?"

But Alicia could n't, and that Florida should, hurt her. She began to cry again, sitting up now and mopping her eyes with a singularly inadequate pocket-handkerchief.

"And Jack knows you are telling me?"

"Yes, and so he never will forgive me. He never will pet me like that any more. And I'm glad because I could n't bear it. You know how sweet he is when he looks that way at one, and talks to one that way, and calls one little names."

How she knew — oh, *how* Florida knew! It seemed to her that she cried out, aloud, "Don't!" To hear Alicia telling her how sweet he was, saying to her, "You know the way he looks at one and talks to one and calls one little names" — oh, *how* she knew! So often he was sweet still like that, to her too. That was the hardest part of it. It came to her with a sudden rush of fear — of hope, she scarcely knew — that perhaps he would be sweet, like that, when she told him to-night what she meant to do. For the minute she forgot everything else, and heard Jack saying, "I can't let my little girl go away, I'd miss her so." If he were sweet, like that, she'd stay on, just for a word or a look, in the life she could n't stand. She would cry, "Oh, Jack, don't you love me?" And he would say, "Of course, silly." And she would be wildly happy until something annoyed him and the sweetness went, or till Alicia, or some other Alicia, came again and took it away.

Alicia was saying: "Now he'll hate me. That's one reason why I wanted to tell you. But there's

another reason. I do care awfully about you, too, and it seemed as if I had to have you know all about it, and then hate me or not, and tell me either way, and I should n't feel so dreadfully. You *must* hate me."

"No, I'm fond of you."

Alicia flew to her and threw wild young arms about her and kissed her and would not be pushed away.

"You're a nice child, Alicia, and I wish I were your mother or something; somebody who could, had a right to, say things to you."

"I know all the horrid things about me, myself," sobbed Alicia.

Florida looked up at her standing there, biting a corner of her handkerchief.

"I think I'll tell you something," she said.

She pushed Alicia back in the little chair, and herself sat up straight, holding her head high, because what she was going to tell, even though she had done with it all and was only remembering, was hard for her to tell. She wondered if Alicia would understand, and why she so felt that she had to tell her. It was a queer thing to do, as the last thing, before she went away from this world of people who did not care.

"I tell this to you because I'm fond of you, Alicia, and because—I say, don't think I'm an awful prig, putting it this way, I don't know how else to put it—because I think you're worth telling it to. It means a good deal to me to tell it. I wish it did n't sound so priggish to say. But see to it, as you go on, that you are worth anybody's having told a thing like this to you. Don't mind my—preaching—half a minute—will you, Alicia? And don't forget."

"I'll never forget anything you say, Flori, and I'll always try to be worth telling things to. I truly will, and I love you better than most anybody, I think, Flori." She was very intense.

And so was Florida now. "It is that I *have* minded, frightfully, Alicia."

Afterwards, remembering, she wondered if she had been old and indifferent in telling Alicia that, or if she had been very young and generous. She never knew if she said it carelessly or generously, as she added: "You have made me very unhappy."

"Oh, Florida!"

"No, no, don't say anything, there is nothing you can say, it does n't matter. I shall never be unhappy like that any more. And it is not you any more than the others. There have been so many others. I only tell you because you are different from most of them. And perhaps, if you once understand, you won't go on doing that sort of thing."

She dropped her skirt she had been drying at the fire, forgetting herself as she talked, and using her hands with nervous expressive gestures as she went on. "Once, driving in the Bois, somebody pointed out to me a lovely painted lady, and talked about her and Jack, a certain little history that you would have to pretend you did n't understand if one told you. It was n't true, as it happened, at all; now I know he never had to bother about women like that, there are so many like us; but at the time I believed it, and I was glad. Listen, Alicia. I was glad, because there was another woman too, a very beautiful woman, and ever so smart — you'd know her if I named her; anybody would be flattered to have her for a friend. She went everywhere, people always asked her and Jack about together. It's amusing the way everybody asks people who're 'having an

affair,' and leaves them alone, as if they were engaged people; but at the time it made me rather frightfully unhappy, this affair of Jack's, and I was glad to think there was a painted lady to take him away from her. The painted lady could take his jewels, but she could n't, in the way the other woman had, take the things I cared far more for. He would n't have glanced at the painted lady if he'd met her when he was with me. She could n't have had the best of his thoughts, or those little ways, the little sweet looks and tones, that sort of tenderness he has, you know, Alicia, as if he felt one were so infinitely better than he. Perhaps it was only that the sort of love he'd have given a woman like that I could n't, somehow, realize. But any way I should n't have had to *see*, to be where they were, always, and *see*. The painted lady could n't ever have hurt me as the other woman did. You see, the other woman was quite as 'good' as I was, and when they told me about the painted lady, I thought one can't say that of her. Alicia, I'll tell you a thing that you will understand, I think, because you are different from the rest of them. It's that I wanted Jack to think of me to-day. It's my baby's birthday. Last year there was a cake with five candles. I've been remembering, awfully. I did want Jack to think of me to-day. And you took all his thoughts, Alicia, all and all and all."

Alicia, sitting opposite her, stared at her silently, not crying any more; unhappy, one saw that, a long way beyond tears. Probably unhappiness like this that Florida deliberately showed her had never before come near her. Probably she had not known that people cared so, except in the books one was not allowed to read. She sat staring dumbly at Florida.

After a minute Florida gave herself a little shake. "I suppose one ought to fight back," she said, "but sometimes one is ill, or too unhappy, or cares so frightfully much that one can't, or just does n't know how. — It must be time to dress for dinner."

"Flori, oh, Flori, what can I say?" said Alicia.

"Nothing," answered Florida wearily. She sat with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. Alicia turned round in her chair and put her arms on the back of it, hiding her face upon them. Florida desolately felt, even in the midst of it, how pathetic they were, both of them, so intense and absurdly ignorant. She felt her ignorance of life in those moments, as never before. But she was not afraid. She would escape from all there was to fear in life, and be safe; but for Alicia it was different, she knew. For her there was so little safety. There came to Florida something of a wish to get Alicia out of it too somehow, beyond these things that were so strange and very sad. In the long silence, it seemed to her afterwards, things that were going to happen must have shadowed themselves upon them, all unaware.

After a while Alicia cried again, "I'm so ashamed."

Florida put indifference into a gesture. "Oh, there've been lots of others. I look back down quite a long line of Alicias. You happen to be the last one who can ever bother me, but that is n't because you're worse than the others."

"If I'd known you cared, Florida." She came over to Florida's chair and stood there, desperate and helpless.

"You never thought of it," said Florida, "but afterwards do think about it, Alicia. And when you see good women taking all the little good things a

man has to give, the little things that are the whole of life, think how they may be taking away the whole of life from some one. Don't cry, for this time it does n't matter, only think of it sometimes when it may matter."

"Florida, you despise me?" covering her face with her hands.

"No, I'm fond of you. I wish you were away out of it all."

She said it vaguely; she did not know what vision passed dim before her. She stood up and went to Alicia and pulled her wet hands away from her eyes.

"Don't cry, only remember. I don't know why I so want you to remember. I wonder why it is, Alicia. Kiss me and go dress; it's late."

VI

It was to seem to Florida always afterwards, looking back to that last evening, quite the oddest part of it that Illsboro and she had so carelessly passed one another, he in his coming and she in going, barely noticing one another, when so very shortly, and in a way that for its time was to matter so intensely, they were to be thrown again together. Neither knew then that they were to be brought from their far set ways and closed in alone together by that circle which death draws so absolutely, as no force of life does, about those whose destinies he makes mock of. She wondered, when Illsboro came afterwards to signify so greatly to her, how it could possibly have been that then he had not mattered, except as he had mattered to everybody, and she had been simply one of the crowd.

He mattered that evening enormously much, in-

deed, for their indifferent world, to everybody. The possession he took of everybody and everything was complete. They had been saying in the drawing-room before he came down very late, that really people ought not to have him; the title was frightfully old, of course, and a frightfully good property, but really, that affair, don't you know, had been quite too much. Of course, if that really were over, it might be different, but who knew? It might still be going on, for all one knew; he might have come directly from her. But when he came swinging into the drawing-room, so glad to see everybody that nobody could possibly help being glad to see him, the doubters ceased. He brought such a spirit of merriment into the midst of them, and so flung it over them that there was no resisting him or his mirth. In ten minutes they were all merry too, and young, like children at a school-room feast. How he managed to turn the drawing-room into a school-room Florida never could quite remember, but the magic of the change was thorough. Nobody, not even the duchess, seemed above the fun, and nobody was left out. Florida was only conscious of an adorably joyous and heedless person making the evening less horribly hard to get through; a big, beautiful, leisurely, gentle person, with kind eyes, a charming voice, and a way that made unhappy things seem quite right at once. He must have been a dozen years older than Florida; he was what one calls a man of the world, finished and perfected, but the splendor and force of youth, that had been so present in his stride through the mist and in his singing in the woods was the thing she most felt, and was curiously comforted to feel. The duchess did try, a little, to make things awkward, asking: "Where had he hidden himself all these years? What had he been doing?" But she only drew out

absurd stories, told with that disarming laugh of his. Everybody laughed with him, except Jack, who watched Alicia, and Alicia, who kept close to Florida and watched Illsboro — that, at least, Florida noticed, and had reason to remember tragically afterwards — with round, fascinated eyes. It was not anything Illsboro said or did, just that he was there, and so glad to be there, that made the evening different.

Alicia could not look away from him. Her flower face, still marked with tears, had a new lightening and wistfulness, as if, not at all understanding why, she was glad to be a school-room child again and play. Florida, between the moments of laughter, wondered at him. He had come back so rapturously to all that she was going to leave. They met and touched and passed. From what unknown things of the wandering years had he come back? To what unknown things of wandering years was she going out? She thought of the woman who never could come back to this world that Illsboro so evidently loved. What became of a "woman like that," who had given up all things for just one thing, when that one thing failed? What world had she when he came back to "this"?

After dinner Illsboro must have them all do things together; nobody must play bridge, there must be no wandering off into corners.

"Oh, let's play games!" cried Alicia, then, frightened at her own daring, having brought all their eyes upon herself, blushed delightfully. Illsboro noticed her then for the first time, in her pretty confusion, as Florida, not especially watching or caring, just happened to see. He was not a person to take in detail very quickly, that was plain, but he could not help taking in the effect Alicia gave out just then of his meaning something to her. Florida felt this, putting

it down to the poor child's need of somewhere to turn to from Jack. When Illsboro swung round and really looked at Alicia, it was just when she was not looking at him, but with frightened, little girl's eyes at her mother, to find some answering reassurance there. She need not be afraid, for he was an earl, and the property was "frightfully good," as they had said: the Honorable Mrs. Temple-Vaulx felt (and said so with her eyes) that under some circumstances one must not judge too harshly.

"Let's play games!" cried Illsboro. "Alicia, how does one play London Bridge?"

Nobody could have told why it was such fun. The duchess joined, superbly indifferent to silks and laces. The poet forgot the drawing-room. Evelyn and the captain played charmingly, both of them, Evelyn's soft, really Southern laugh chiming out, and the captain's unaccustomed ha-ha following. Bob played, clumsily upsetting things. Jack played in pursuit of Alicia. But Alicia was not flirting; she and Illsboro were playing earnestly, ten years old, each of them determined to win. The Honorable Mrs. Temple-Vaulx played with bland condescension, beaming upon Alicia and Illsboro. And all the other people, the figures in the background of that world, as Florida all down a long afterwards was to remember it, played like a confusion of marionettes. She herself laughed the more wildly, because she was conscious all the time of the passing of minutes that brought her nearer to what she was going to do. When most she laughed, most she was conscious of being far apart from it all, as if she belonged to a world as different as the world from which Illsboro had come.

She was thinking, while she held Illsboro's two hands in London Bridge, and the procession of the

others, with much laughter and ducking of heads, was passing through, how odd it was that he should have come just as she was going, and that they should hold hands like this and laugh.

"London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down,
Falling down,
London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady."

They caught Alicia, Florida remembered it so well afterwards, and they held her, annoyed and rather afraid, her bright hair tumbled about her eyes. Somebody called, "You kiss 'em when you catch 'em," and Alicia looked at Florida rather wildly, but Illsboro said, not teasing at all, or even looking at Alicia: "Bosh! You make 'em pay forfeits, and then they redeem 'em standing on their heads and things, don't you, Mrs. Marvin?"

Florida always liked to remember that.

When she said the good-night that she felt would be really a good-bye, somehow, all suddenly, it was Illsboro who most counted in her leaving.

The duchess, in the ante-room, turning from the supper tray, with a glass of port wine in one hand and a biscuit in the other, said to her, with things somehow written in between the lines that neither of them dared read aloud: "Good-night! Gobble your half loaf!"

Bob said, lighting her silver-sconced candle, the flame waving red and yellow between them: "I say, you do look raggy. If ever there were anythin' I could do, d'y' see?"

But Illsboro, as she turned from them all to the door, to the shadows of the corridor and the sweet wet autumn smell of the night that came in through its open windows, just happened to say to her, not

heeding his words in the least: "Good-night, little ghost out of the mist. Be happy!"

And afterwards, when things strange enough brought them together, and it happened to each of them to have a part hard to play in the other's life, it was the memory of how happy he had been that night in his home-coming that Florida kept with her to make her understand and forgive.

VII

SHE sent a message to Jack, asking him to stop at her door when he came up, and his answer that, as he was playing bridge, he could not come for some time, gave her the sense she might have known she was to have all along, of having put out her hand in really desperate last appeal to some one who did not so much as know it was there. She thought, rather bitterly amused, that it had always been like that and would be like that down to the last word. All that was most intense in her, that most made her what she was, he simply did not see. There would be no use trying to tell him, when he finished his bridge and came, after "some time"; and yet she could not help sending him word that she would wait. She knew not if it were the fear of his being "sweet" or the hope of it that died so cruelly hard, that made her wait.

Eleven o'clock, she heard the stable-clock striking. The house was very still; she heard the steps of the man who had brought her Jack's answer, echoing all the way down the long corridor. In her room the stiff chintz curtains stirred at the windows, and the night air came in to where the fire was burning. The room was so large that the lamp scarcely lighted it, a lonely room to one who waited.

She kept Manson with her as long as she could, getting into her dressing-gown and talking all the while, because she was afraid of the silence. She knew that Manson, accustomed to the service of ladies so great that in the privacy of their chambers they wore only thick gray flannels, always touched her pretty things with a sense of adventure, as if pleasure in them must be dangerous and wrong. That her talking, as she talked to-night, really troubled Manson, set her worrying, not only about herself for not leaving so untrained a mistress, but about the mistress too, for whom she had a care which she would probably have said she was not in a position to demonstrate. "If there's nothing more I can do for you, madame—" There was so much she could have done! She might have said: "You poor little thing, I do love you, even if I'm only your maid, and I can't help thinking you need caring for. Let me just show you I care." But she only said: "If there is nothing more I can do for you, madame —"

"You're sleepy, Manson? You want to go?"

"Indeed, madame, unless there is something more I can do for you, madame—" She hesitated; perhaps, like the duchess, she wanted to say something across the space that was between them; but if that were so, like the duchess she did not say it. "Then, unless you would have me wait up for you, madame, I had best bid you good-night."

Florida waited, sitting very still in a shabby chintz-covered chair by the fire, counting the minutes and listening for Jack's step. Very many times in the seven years she had sat so, waiting and listening, and always the sound of his step had given her the same thrill. There had never, in the seven years, been any lessening of her love for him, and she had never

loved him more than she loved him to-night; that was why she must go. One could not love like that and go on living as they lived, he and she. She could have gone on with him through any hardship; through poverty and want, through sorrow or sin or shame, there was nothing she could not have borne in the keeping up, if only he had cared that she did keep up. "Oh, my king, all the world abandons thee," — what could not she have lavished on him of love and faith and service, had he ever so barely needed it. Almost, in the savagery of loving, she would have hurt him that she might tend him, have had him in want that she might slave for him, disgraced that she might be loyal to him, by all others deserted that she might hold him in complete possession. How mad and stupid of her it had been . . .

She told herself, as she waited and listened now, how little indeed any of the fault had been his. She had dreamed the dream and it was not his fault that her dream could not come true. It had been a fault of her own, as old as her life. She had dreamed all her life, "making believe," till the real and unreal were all wound in together, and dreams had come to mean for her more than realities. Just as, when a child, she had "made believe" a beautiful lady called Monna Lia, and fashioned her out of books and pictures, — a beautiful dream-lady, who comforted her when Mamma was cross, and played with her when Evelyn would not play, and always understood; who came to be to her more real than any of the real people about her, — so, out of the separation and curious loneliness of her persisting childhood, she went on "making believe" a life and a love, a world and a king of dreams, fashioning the man she loved almost as wholly out of her own heart's need as she had fashioned Monna Lia, making so her own idol, to set

up in her empty little life's niches and worship. She had made believe what Jack was out of what she wanted him to be, his love for her out of her love for him; and she had gone on so, making believe, for a long time. She had kept up the make believe as long as she could, but she could not keep it up any longer.

She thought back to the beginning of it. It had been the winter she was seventeen. Evelyn was to be married, and because it "looked better" to have the wedding at home, they were back for the last time in the shabby old house near Washington Square. The ailanthus trees in the little yard were bare, and the grass on either side of the flagged path between iron gate and front door was sodden down and frozen. They were still in deep mourning, but the house was always full of people, so much had they managed to retain of an old name's potency, — people, it seemed to Flori, who were always gay and laughing. Florida, laughing with the rest of them, would stop suddenly, afraid lest the laughter should "bother" her father who was not there. She could not bear to have them laugh in that special room of the chair and the desk and the books he had had to leave behind him. And once, discovered dreaming alone in that room, she had talked aloud of her dreams to the king of the dreams himself, who had opened the door suddenly, sent, it appeared, by Evelyn to look for something. He stayed a long afternoon through with Florida there, to Evelyn's exceeding wrath. She well remembered it all, the shabby room in which the presence of her father so lingered, — the father who had never been her friend. The merciless American sunshine laid bare all the dinginess and disorder of the old "study," and she had been homesick for a softer light. It had been easy that day to talk to her king of dreams! She had been pretending talking to him so

long and so much, as she had watched him, Evelyn's friend, that now it was just the make believe going on. And that was what it had been all along, from that day till to-night, just make believe. To-night, remembering, she wondered how she had ever achieved so utterly unreal a make believe. If only she could talk to him to-night when he came as she had talked then. Then she had told him her many little lonely things, had talked to him as she never had talked to any one before in all her life; and he had held her hands, as he had held Alicia's the other day down by the peacock cedars, and called her his "poor little girl," as he called all the Alicias. She had been always just that for him, she knew now; just another Alicia, an Alicia quicker than most with the thing called temperament, an Alicia so intense and responsive, so lavish and ready in giving love as to make him forget for a time all the others and fall, so to put it, in love with her, or, as after a while she came to know, in love with her worship of him. She never, not for all Evelyn's almost visible envy, "took it in" that she was marrying "frightfully" well. There was no gold for her but love; she made believe that the shower was of gold sunshine, and in the light of it set out on her way all fearlessly, she and her prince of the illusions.

They went their way into life together, but it was not as she had believed it would be. It was the way of people who "go out" so much that they have no need of a home, have indeed no home, no matter how many houses they may own; so many friends that they do not need one another; and so many things to do that they never do anything together. She came to hate the big rooms in which they were so far apart; the charming things to do, that took them always in opposite directions. She came to hate

polished floors and mirrors and electric lights. She hated the gold, as she more and more came to find that it was not a shower of sunbeams, but hard, bright coins that hurt as they fell on one.

Yet even in that life she had managed to make believe. She remembered, as she waited for Jack this last time, how for a while she had made believe a life they should lead some day in the narcissus garden at Coll' Alta; the dawns they should go out to meet together, the deep, azure days they would wander through, the sunsets, and the long purple twilights. Italy, that had given so much to making her what she was, had left its spell for always upon her, — the spell of longing and melancholy which that land gives perhaps more tensely to strangers than to its own accustomed people; she was never to lose the force of something primitive and savage that had come to her there, she never knew how much from what she herself was, or how much from contact with those people who either sleep or are all afire. And never was she to lose Italy's beautiful, fatal gift of the power to dream. It was that power to dream which had under-currented all her days, had been to her at once her hope and her danger, — the danger that had wrecked her now but must be her hope ahead of this. She concentrated all her hope now as she looked ahead upon the mood of the narcissus garden. That was her own absolutely; Jack was quite left out of that. He had shut himself out long ago, when they had gone to the garden, as her dearest wish and dream, in the first winter after their marriage. Sometimes she had broken her heart over their three days there of disillusion and irrevocable mistake; and sometimes, the worst times, she had laughed.

Now, to-night, waiting, she nursed the memory of both tears and laughter, armed herself with it against

the chance she dreaded, or perhaps hoped for, of Jack's being sweet. He would have to be sweet only ever so little, and it would all begin over again. She hardened her heart as she waited, recalling detail after detail of the make believe she had kept up through their brilliant, empty days. She lived over again the life they lived, as just the fact of having money seems to compel people to live, always in the whirl, never stopping at home unless there were people, whether in the Fifth Avenue house or the Newport cottage, the place up the river or the shooting in Scotland, the apartment in the Avenue du Bois or the villa at Cannes; never traveling without that atmosphere, taken along, as it were, with the luggage, which makes all the world for certain people just a place where one dresses like this or that. — There was one make believe that she had never come quite to laugh at. She made believe that they were poor and had none of the things that money brought in, as it were, between them; that they both worked, and at the day's end came home to one another. Perfection was in the hour when he would leave his work and come home to her, and she would put away her work and wait for him, and each was all the other had. She made believe the rooms they lived in. It did n't matter where they were, but they must be small rooms and shabby. Sometimes the make believe windows looked on those rounded blue roofs of Paris where the swallows live. It would surely be some old, forgotten quarter; the canary's cage would hang between window-boxes of mignonette and geraniums, or perhaps she would have a little potted garden on her neighbor's roof, under the window. Perhaps from the windows she could see some wide, wonderful vista of river and roof line, or along garden allées, or some picturesque turn of a street, with cheery life passing

through it busily up and down. The swallows would dart with their little cry across the windows in red sunsets, and the twilight cries, softly purple, would meet the gold glow of the lamp she lighted against his coming. Sometimes the windows had looked upon a New York side street, — one of the little old streets near Washington Square. There would be a glimpse of the North River under the dark heavy mass of the elevated railroad, and the sun would pour straight down through the street, like a flooded river, past the windows, and the cheap little white curtains at the windows would know the stir of breezes salt from the sea. She never made believe about the narcissus garden any more, that was a hope quite given up. All the make believe was of cities. The wilderness seemed to be quite out of her imagining. She was glad of that now, as she thought over things while she waited; she could have *that* without missing Jack from it.

There was another make believe that helped her now to grow very hard, remembering. It had just been that they lived their life as they really lived it, with a difference. All the while at a dance she would make believe that, driving home afterwards in the coupé, Jack would hold her hand, and that she could nestle close against him, and they would look out together to the dawn, beautiful in the streets. Together, being together, that was the one difference that would have meant everything. If only sometimes she could have looked to him past other people and met something that was just for her in his eyes. If only he had ever come home glad to find her, and nobody else, there, or had wanted to do this or that together.

That, until now, she had never quite given up "making believe." It hurt, with actual, physical pain, to think, as she sat waiting for Jack, of this make believe that had not come true.

She tortured herself with repeating that it had been all her fault. And yet it had seemed so right a dream, just that Jack should like to have her with him, should care, in whatever life they were living, to have her there. That he might want her — for that she had lived, and for that she had given up other things, all other things, even the poor little baby, who they all said was better where he was. Where he was! Oh, those fortunate people who believed that the dead might in the terrible vastness be found again — even the little baby dead, whose souls must be so tiny and white and dim to seek. It seemed to her strange sometimes that the thought of other babies, and other women who had grieved for them, did not make her grief less lonely. She wondered if women could love beautiful, well, happy babies as she had loved her baby. Surely not with the same complete possession, the same passion of absolute possession. Her baby had been all her own, loved by nobody else.

She got up from her chair by the fire and began to walk about through the lights and shadows of the room. If Jack had cared, if only he had cared to have her there, or if only she could have kept up the make believe! But that was over. She had walked the room many times up and down before she heard Jack's step and his knock.

As he closed the door behind him he said: "Well, here I am; what do you want? Mind, they're all waiting for me."

That was the picture, then. She was to take this away with her, and keep with her, all the time. She was for very long to see him so turning to her, a little annoyed, a little impatient, just stopped in for the minute, the minute that meant so much to her, scarcely to be asked to wait through it, his hand on the knob of the door. There he stood, perfectly a thing of the

world of "this," so absolutely belonging to it that she wondered how possibly she could dream of getting him apart from it, of ever having anything more of him than just a minute snatched like this in the midst of it. All the charm of his world clad him, its grace and finish; nobody gave quite as he gave it the impression of having been made for a going smoothly of things. That very impression of things having gone smoothly always, being certain always to go smoothly, was part of his charm as typically as it was part of the charm of the life he so belonged to. He was beautiful as the life was, with that special beauty which could sometimes so hurt one. He stood there against the door, not a great splendid thing like Illsboro, but small and lightly built, with a distinction, an elegance, a something quite indefinable, that would have made most women forget all Illsboro's beauty. Never had an Alicia felt all this about him more consciously than did Florida at this moment. A charm intangible was in his every tone and gesture, as of some quick, bright thing one could not hold or catch. Nothing had ever caught him in his life, no care or need or pain or wrong. What wrong there was he passed through like the bird or the butterfly one somehow could not help comparing him with, through the grasp of a hand that might have marred and had not. He was very cruel, yet it seemed no more wrong in him than in the light, lovely, flying things that are so merciless to one another. He never had been hurt, he never would be hurt. He never had known, or would know, that he hurt others. Nothing in his life had ever taught him self-control, or made him realize that he needed it; or made him think, or made him realize that he had better have thought. Nothing had touched him, so nothing had marked him. There was not a line in his finely cut

dark face, nor about the dark eyes that were so deep and had so little in their depths; nor the mouth, that had no seal upon it either of sweetness or cruelty to hide under the little dark mustache. Thirty-five years had left him charming and purposeless, "molto simpatico," as Maria Domenica, in those dire three days of the garden, used to say; a charming thing, but curiously out of touch or any reach of appeal. He stood looking at Florida, in this decisive moment of both their lives, and said: "Well, now I'm here, what do you want? Mind, they're all waiting for me."

"Jack, I can't stand it," she began.

"Can't stand what?"

"Your not wanting me, your not needing me —"

She was beginning all wrong. She saw what she had known she would see in his face, and yet she went on: "This life, unless you care for me —"

"What life? What are you talking about? Why is it any special sort of a life? Look here, I hate nonsense."

"I know. I don't mean to be stupid, but I'm so unhappy, Jack." Even as she stumbled on she knew that there is no stupidity like that of unhappiness, but she could not change.

"Well," he said, "I can't help it. I'm sorry."

She knew that was just the hopelessness of it, that he could not help it, and that she could not, and nobody could. It was, — not, as they tragically say, "as it had been written," but rather just as it had happened, all clumsily and feebly happened; a vast deal of suffering without any reason, a helpless working over and round and round, a gathering for a climax that, now it came, was no climax, but a "petering out," a falling very flat indeed, of a tragedy that no one would have known for tragic, that indeed, knowing at all, any one would have

laughed and shrugged shoulders over. To other women despair came for some cause that would have stood out before the world, dramatic and easily to be understood. To her it came the more cruelly because it was so utterly not to be understood, and because so hopelessly she wanted this man, scowling as he lit his cigarette, to understand it. In her stupid *wanting* that he should, she went on trying to make him understand. She knew it would have been better to stop there, and leave the things unsaid, but she went stumbling on, knowing she stumbled. She had gone over it all so often, all the things she would say to him. She must say them all now, if ever she were to, for it was the last time. She knew that she had said things too often; she knew so well that it was not the way, but she was unhappy beyond taking or seeing any other way. She had tried so hard and for so long and always so mistakenly that now it was of no use. Through those endless quarter-hours she had waited for Jack to-night she had known that whatever she said she would only make things worse, and yet she went on.

"Tell me that you — that you care."

"Look here, if you're bothering about Alicia."

"Oh, no, it's not Alicia."

"Well, what is it then?"

"Jack, I can't say it like this. Please come and sit down. I'll not keep you long, truly."

"I've not got time. Tell me whatever it is you want to tell me, for they're waiting."

She stood before him. "I can't go back to America," she said, "I simply *can't*."

"Well, there's no reason why you should go back," he said.

That was just the misery of it: she so wanted that there should be a reason why she should go back.

"You won't want me? If you wanted me, if only you wanted me, then it would be all right."

"What are you talking about? What would be all right? And they're waiting for me, I just came up when I cut out."

"I don't mean for just now, Jack, I mean for always."

"Oh, don't make a fuss out of it! It is n't that I don't want you, of course; you put everything in that way. Another woman would do just as she pleased, without heroics. You can stop on here with Evelyn, or go anywhere else you like. Lots of women do. It's nothing to make a fuss over. I want to go back, and you don't; so why can't I, and why need you? We'll just go our own ways for a little, like lots of other people. And then I'll be over for Paris in the spring."

She saw, down a vista, Paris and the spring, as living up to him made it for her, — the play, the races, the restaurants, the clothes and the people, the same people, the same things, the same peacocks' feathers, the same bronze gods.

"Oh, Jack, we're so far away from one another!" she cried out. "I want us to be together." She laid it down before him, so plain a thing. It was an humiliation that it should be so plain and laid so low. Of course he said: "And yet you don't want to go back to America. I confess to not seeing the point." She flung out her hands to him. "If in America we were together, or here, or in Paris; but we never are. I don't mean just dining at the same houses, but little things, — it would n't matter what things, — just by ourselves. But there are always people and things between. And no coming home to each other. In all our life we're never together. Oh, listen. Won't you come away from everybody and

everything just for a little while and let us try to be together? I can't, I simply can't stand this sort of living any more."

There it was out, before herself, from whom perhaps she most had guarded it, mercilessly flung out that she wanted him, "frightfully," to keep her in his life; in any way, oh, in any way, to keep her, even if it were in weariness and wearing, even if it were out of a heritage of dreams, at all cost to her, to keep her. She was not looking at him. She had a great dread of what she might see in his face. "Come away with me to a place where there is quiet," she went on now. "I don't mean Coll' Alta, that you'd be so bored by, but just anywhere, — where we could be alone, you and I, and begin again and learn like that, for it's the only way to make a better thing out of life than ever we have made of it." She stopped, for there was no going on.

"Look here, Florida, I've told you, you can do whatever you like. Do whatever you please, why on earth should n't you? Only let me do as I like, too. Is that all? I'll go down."

He started, throwing his cigarette into the fire.

"Oh, please, please, don't go yet!"

"What more is there to say?"

"Only — I wanted you to understand."

"What more is there to understand?"

She flung away in a gesture all hope of trying ever and ever to answer.

Something that was in her eyes made him come nearer to her.

"You funny little Flori," he said, laughing from his almost even height over at her, and as he said it the thing that most of all she loved him for was in his face, his untouchedness, the thing that would keep him apart always from evil, even as it kept him apart

from good, that had kept him, in a life like the life of other men, curiously *sweeter* than other men: Florida thought always when he looked at her, or at some Alicia, with that something of untouchedness in his eyes, of that word for him — sweet.

“You funny little thing,” he said, laughing at her.

A moment ago she had wanted him to understand; now she only wanted him to care. That he did not understand would not have mattered if only he had cared. And she said: “Oh, why are you so sweet if that’s all there is of it? Why do you give me anything when you won’t give me enough? Why don’t you let me starve outright? — ”

It was the last stupid thing of her. His face darkened instantly.

“Oh, if you’re going to begin that — ”

He turned away, but she caught his hand.

“I can’t help it. If you knew how I loved you. Let me say it this once, for it’s the last time. I love you as if there were no one, nothing, on earth or in heaven, but you.”

She let go his hand and stood looking at him.

“You funny little thing,” he said again. “I really must go back to the others.”

PART II

I

To Maria Domenica and Bacè it seemed, when it happened, that always they had known it would happen. Before she opened the telegram, there in the lamplit big old stone kitchen, the nurse knew it would be from her Signorina, whom nobody of Coll' Alta had ever come to call Signora. She only said to Bacè, as she gave him the yellow paper with the white printed slip upon it: "There, at last." And it seemed quite needless to add, to Pascà's boy who had brought the telegram up all the way in the wet November dark from Colla Bassa, and to the Stranger who had stopped in at the garden house begging, as usual, something for somebody, "It is the Signorina who comes back." Bacè's faded blue eyes met hers, having no need at all to read the telegram; he got up from where he knelt in the corner, binding cane screens for the shelter of his garden beds from such wind and frost as soon would follow upon the rains of these days, and said to the Stranger, "Let me take your lantern. I go out to see if there may possibly be narcissus open to-morrow." To the nurse and her old brother it had always been a thing secure that one belonging to the place as their Signorina had so absolutely belonged to it must one day, sooner or late, come back. But it was not a thing to be talked of, even to the Stranger, to whom usually the whole paese talked of everything.

Bacè took the lantern and went out into the rain-torn and rutted garden, where every branch he brushed against in the dark showered wet upon him,

and the clayey mud of the paths caked under his big boots till he walked on stilts.

Maria Domenica left it for the Stranger to find Pascà's boy something to eat after his long climb, and went across the entrance passage to the rooms at the east end of the house that had been the Signorina's.

The damp of the season's rain clung to the walls of the passage and made an irised fringe about the wick that burned in its glass of oil and water before the Madonna in the niche over the house door. The Signorina's rooms, as Maria Domenica opened them, were, in spite of the care she took of them, full of the damp, cold and deserted on the door's opening. She struck a light and set it to wick after wick of the three-beaked old bronze lamp, and the circle of the lamplight, as it spread about her, started up a troop of memories with the starting shadows. At the little table where the lamp stood, the Signorina, on cold nights like this, when one could not stay out in the garden, had always used to eat her supper of ceci soup and omelette and bread and white wine. Maria Domenica could almost see her now, first a little girl just come to the garden house, staring wide-eyed at this strange new nurse over the rim of the earthen soup bowl, and next a grown-up little girl, years after, leaving the garden house never to come back to it in the same old dear way, crying very quietly and desolately over the narcissus Bacè had laid beside her plate. Maria Domenica could almost see a certain blue dress her Signorina had worn as a child. Maria Domenica remembered her having had it on that summer night when she refused to go to bed at all, and sat huddled all night in the deep window recess, a wicked, happy little heap, crooning to the stars. In summer this room, with all its

windows and its garden door open, had seemed actually a part of outdoors. The grape-vines curled round the door's hinges, the pigeons strutted in and out; and once a field mouse had nested on the hearth, — Maria Domenica could see the Signorina yet, dancing with excitement at the discovery. In the winter evenings the Signorina had sat on the little three-legged stool before the fire, her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, telling herself stories. And she had stood on just the middle step of the three leading from the book-room up to the bedroom, which was a little higher, as the house was built against the hillside, when she hesitated for the last instant, at the end of those three days there with the Signore, and had cried out to the peasant woman, who almost understood, "It's of no use, Maria Domenica; it's none of it of any use." Maria Domenica had long tormented herself with the thought of the trouble, whatever it might be, that had made her foster child so unhappy in those years spent away from her comforting. And now her child was coming back and without the Signore and to stay.

To Maria Domenica, who knew a good deal really of the world beyond the olive hills, the coming of the little Signorina from that other world into this had always been mysterious and beautiful. It had meant a great deal to her, and she had almost understood what it meant to the child. She had seen enough of the child's life in the big Riviera hotels, and heard enough of what it was in America, across that unrealizable distance of land and sea. She knew it did not often happen to a little girl whose father was a scholar and a dreamer, and whose mother wore the loveliest of Paris hats, to live in an old Ligurian mountain house, that must once have been a casa

signorale. The vaulted ceilings of the house, the floors of red brick tiles, the thick walls with windows deep set as casements in a fortress, the great stone hearths, survivals of the country's ancient altars, on which every day's fire was laid like a fire of sacrifice, were a strange setting for the little life, — she felt that. The child's presence in it all had meant so much to the old nurse that she almost knew what being there must have meant to the child. And now the child, grown up, was coming back, to belong to her again. The loneliness of eight years seemed lightening already in the rooms.

Maria Domenica went to the south windows and threw them open to the unseen distances of hills and valleys, and the north windows upon the close-pressing darkness of the hillside. The autumn odors of the night and the garden, the autumn soundlessness, so intense after the summer's myriad voices, came exquisitely in. But she left closed and shuttered the east windows, those looking toward the castle, and made the Sign of the Cross as she passed them; and when, in the room up the three steps, she found the jalousies of one window facing that way a little open, just enough to give a glimpse of the castle's lighted windows, she drew the shutters close, and made that other sign too, pointing two fingers against the peril which of a dark night one does not name. She turned from that window as if she were afraid of staying near it, and went about doing what there was for her to do in the rooms.

Fires were laid ready, as she had always kept them, on the big stone hearths of both the rooms, and now she started up a fine blazing of olive wood and pine cones. The good light leaping through the rooms drove fear out of them, and the soft little crackling, purring sound of the wood burning, and

the smell of it, and of the resin of the pine cones, gave something very good of everydayness to the sense.

It was yet early. The bells of the campanile up in the town were ringing only nine; the garden-house had twenty-four hours in which to prepare itself for the Signorina's coming. Time and again before he slept Bacè must take a light and go out to look at his narcissus, where earliest they uncurled their frail white petals down by the well on the lower terrace. And till far into the night Maria Domenica with the lamp in her hand must just uselessly move about the rooms that had been her little nursling's, caressing the things she had left behind her, planning impossibly grand ways of welcoming her.

Bacè loved the Signorina. His narcissus that she had loved must blossom for her; he would have prayed or toiled all night that their white stars might shine for her; the filling of the green bowl with them was the expression of the best he knew of love and understanding for her. He loved so much that he was stupid about it; shrewd old Bacè, clever enough as to "padding" his flower baskets for the dealers, and making the tourists buy whatever the dealers left over, down in the dusty little market place, behind the Ventimiglia station; very gentle Bacè, who would have stabbed an enemy and boasted of it, yet so gentle in his love for her that he would have laid down all he had, like the narcissus, at her feet without thought of gain. And if love for the Signorina had great part in his life, to Maria Domenica it was almost life itself. Eloquent as she was, with the expressiveness of her people, their instinctive need of wording a thing and their knowledge of how to word it, she could not have put in words the thing her nurse-child came to mean in her life. Having experience,

as Bacè had not, of the world outside, she saw the coming of the two little girls from that outside world into this always as a thing of wonder. There had been no one, nothing, in her life that had so laid hold upon her imagination as this child Florida, who was not her own, and yet her own so closely. Evelyn she and the whole paese had soon set aside with the "*non è simpatica*" beyond which there need be nothing said; to Florida they had all given the devotion and adoration of their class and people, in whom there is yet left, tragically and lovably, so much of the serf. "My mistress," Maria Domenica had loved to say, even as she had loved to say "my littlest one, my naughtiest little one," and pet or punish the child Florida, or Florida grown up, while yet proud to serve her humbly or greatly as the case might be. The coming of the child to Coll' Alta and her instant and lasting love of it had been just at the end of Maria Domenica's wandering from it, — a wandering sprung from something that made her different from the others there and more restless, and ended by that something else in her which after all was strongest, that something ineradicable of her race and class, of Italy and the soil's own people. Bacè, unadventurous, content with the things of his garden, had never understood why his sister had left the garden house. When their parents died and his pretty little peasant wife, for those few years which she had lived, was in possession of the garden house, Maria Domenica had left it, seeking some unknown thing out in the world. He never understood her going, nor did he even dimly imagine what she had found out there, whatever it was that made her fall silent at a mere question of it, or break out savagely sometimes while she rolled the bread or mended the linen — "Oh, the streets, — the terrible, cruel streets, — the

night, — and the lights, — and the faces — ” in tones full of sinister suggestion and fascination. He never understood why she came back from it all, nor her moods afterwards. His Gemma was dead then, and he mourned her, and could not understand why Maria Domenica should say of her lying in the Holy Field: “They like that have peace.” He did not know what her coming back to finish her life out here, as he would so naturally finish his, in the place of their fathers, meant to Maria Domenica, nor did he know, for all the love he gave the Signorina, what her coming, as just the little child she was, signified to the sister living her life out beside him. He had been glad the Signorina loved the house and the garden, and thought but vaguely of how odd it was for a little girl like her to grow up intimately there. The garden by which he and his sister lived, even as it lived by them, its prospering repaying their care, with all its struggle and fear, the desperate matter of each year’s success or failing, seemed to Bacè only dimly a rather strange thing for a child so to take from and dwell in. Bacè could not well understand, but Maria Domenica did in her way, how for the little Signorina living in the garden house and garden a whole special set of happinesses awakened to existence. Getting up of a morning in the old rooms, laying oneself down to sleep and dreams at night, coming home to the garden house from wherever else, the rapture of coming home to the gate in the wall, the path, the terrace steps, the dark old stone doorway, the certain very special smell of it all, of stone and age, of dust and damp together; of bread and wine and of the grain stored in the loggia, the pungency of the linen drying in the sun on the grass — he could not guess, though Maria Domenica did, how waves of remembrance of all this were to sweep over Florida

in after years out in the world at the sound of that rather tragic word *home*.

The two rooms that opened from the garden, at the east end of the long low gray house, had been Florida's alone when Evelyn ceased to come there. Like the rest of the house both rooms had ceilings, "a volta" or "a crota," as the dialect had it, with red brick floors, and dark wood paneling as high as the head of the little Flori when she came there. Over the wainscoting, all around the room that had been Evelyn's, Bacè had built a shelf to hold her father's books. She had had them sent there because she loved the books and the garden house, and wanted them together. However far away she was in the world, she liked to think of her books in the place she loved best. She liked to think of the rooms always with the windows wide open, that outdoors might come beautifully in, yet with great fires of olive wood and pine cones burning on the altar hearths. Sometimes she wanted the three-beaked lamp to be lighted, even when there was sunlight shining in the mirror, so dim and green with age, and she would have the flowers of all seasons there together, by the delicious license of imagination.

Her bedroom, up the three steps, had delightful painted walls. The colors were sadly faded, but one could make out, here the sweep of an angel's wing, there the folded, pointed hands of some quite indistinguishable saint, here the drapery of a red mantle, there the blue of Mary's robe, and her face pale against the vague yellow of what once had been a glory around her; all painted, one could see, ignorantly but very sweetly, the labor of a faith that must have really loved. At the feet of Mary stood the little childish white bed, the table where Florida liked to keep her green bowl full of the narcissus, and was so

happy always over the first of them to open. Maria Domenica, moving about the rooms in preparation, remembered, above all such little beautiful things as had made up her life in the garden house, nights when the little girl would hardly sleep for fear she might not wake early enough to-morrow, each day too short for the holding of her delight. Maria Domenica never doubted but that her Signorina would come back to it all with the same intense capacity for feeling. It would be the same happy little girl she would put to bed to-morrow night in the room with the painted walls, and find radiant-eyed when she came to her, wide awake in the next dawn. How the Signorina always loved her bowl of coffee, perhaps with the fire blazing on the hearth, perhaps with the windows flung open to the garden and all the hills! Maria Domenica spent most of that night imagining the to-morrow.

II

THE day on which the Signorina was to come back broke with a special loveliness. Maria Domenica came to the windows of the east rooms when the garden was still colorless and silent, and the hills were only dim shapes in the mists of the valleys. The rains that season had been very cruel. Never in all the years one could remember had the rains done such harm to the hill's poor gardens and little vineyards and olive terraces, washing away and beating down the labor of long hard days and much of the hope of winter. Maria Domenica knew the irony of such soft blue weather coming after the long desolation of storms, but of this sudden loveliness to-day her only thought was that it would please the Signorina.

She opened now, too, the east windows, her fear gone out like witch fires with the daylight. The hillcrest lifted the solid blocked-in mass of the paese's walls and roofs, and the castle's square stern shape and four great towers, against the eastern sky. The lights that had burned all night in a long row of the castle windows went out one by one as Maria Domenica stood watching, and she crossed herself as each gave way before the dawn. She did not make the Sign of the Horn in the daylight, she was not afraid of that then. But it was then that there came to her a dim foreboding, as though the sad, perhaps evil thing of those lights at the windows of the castle warned her of some sorrow for her nurse-child, set her love groping in dread lest it might be some cruelty of the other world, that drove the Signorina "home." She turned, as before, quickly from the window, and went about her work, glad when the sun, big and red, shouldered up between the castle towers, and day filled the world and the garden.

Bacè was already out and busy. Only three narcissus flowers were open, he called up to her from the rain-trampled bed down by the well, but perhaps there might be more by night, he thought, if the sun warmed. In his faded indigo-blue blouse, bent as if he never could straighten himself up from stooping over his garden beds, his head as gray as the boles of the olive trees, his hands as brown and twisted as the roots of things they worked among, he made a curiously poetic thing of his work there, curious indeed, considering how unpoetically he could sometimes chuckle over his gain from it, and how admirably he could sometimes cheat. Only in Italy could there have been such a confusion of tricks and dreams as in the brain of Bacè, such a peasant woman as the

nurse of the little American, with so much greatness of race and class in her blood, so much of intuition, of restlessness and sympathy, yet so much too of the sluggish ignorance of a people long used to oppression, to keep her helpless against unhappiness. Only in Italy could there possibly have been a life like the life of the garden house. Only in Italy could a house and a man and a woman and a garden and a vastness of hills have so utterly belonged together, and only in Italy could have so come together a future and a past.

Nobody knew for how many generations the people of Maria Domenica and Bacè had lived in the garden house. They were said to be a younger branch of the Flaviani, the great family of the Castle and the Marchesato, as their name Fabiani certainly suggested. The father of Maria Domenica and Bacè, who had been schoolmaster, remembered having heard his father, who had been Sindaco, tell of how his father's father had built the gray house, and of how his father again, a man of battle, early in the wars of the Otto Luoghi, had burned down a house much finer than the gray house rather than let it be entered by the Ventimigliese. Surely the garden, which even in those days must have been an old garden, had been built for the pleasure of the people who owned it, not to give them their living. The pergola of slender stone columns, over which the grape-vines were trained along the lower terrace, and the carved stone seat under the cypresses, down by the "cigogna," were made, very likely, by people who would have wondered at the legend painted now on the outside wall, under the name of Giovanni Battista Ercole Antonio Fabiani, "SI VENDE FRUTTI E FIORI — SPEDIZIONE ALL' ESTERO."

The garden was terraced down the hillside and

walled all around. It was not an ordered garden. Things were massed together in lovely confusion, bloom against bloom, stock, wallflower, roses, carnations, violets, frisia, narcissus, jonquils, hyacinths, anemones, tall pale Easter lilies, iris white and purple, — all sorts deepened the terraces in color, through the beautiful following of season on season. Fruit trees too blossomed in their turn, almond and cherry and peach, flinging their drifts of white and pink against the misty gray green of the olives and the blackness of the cypresses that stood tall by the gate. The house was intimately a part of the garden. Time had softened the gray of its walls and grown it half over with heliotrope vines and roses. The seasons gave it part in the life of the garden, spring blossoming close about it and over it, where the vines clambered; summer ripening the apricots on its south wall; autumn bringing grapes to its presses, and figs and chestnuts to be spread to dry on the hurdles before its door; winter pouring the crop of little purple olives on the floor of its loggia, where yellow maize and gourds were already hanging from the arches. And all the sweetness of the garden, all the little sounds of it, came in at the windows of the rooms wherein the little Florida had been so happy, as Maria Domenica aired and prepared them this morning.

This day the breath of late autumn was there, and but seldom a bird note. The sound of the paese bells came from their distance, and the ringing of a hatchet somewhere in the olives, with Bacè's singing over his work, droning over the ancient cantalena of his people. This day the garden, against its gray background of olives and the blue spaces of the hills, was full of smoldering autumn colors. Scarlet salvia, yellow and brown and dull-red chrysanthemums, safrona roses, shrubberies turned to tints of amber and rust

glowed against the olives and the black of the cypresses. Wine-making was over and the fruit had been gathered, but some fragrance of both seemed to linger yet in the heavy air. The mountains swam in haze and sunshine; the poor old little paese on the hilltop, in the soft distance, looked like a crown of very old and yellow ivory. Maria Domenica, lingering all day in the Signorina's rooms, dreamed just as the Signorina would have dreamed, thinking no more than the Signorina would have thought of how the whole house had a some two or three hundred years' need of tidying. The firelight would fill the rooms for the Signorina when she came; the open windows would let the spell of the autumn night in to her; the narcissus in the green bowl would be lovely for her; supper by the book-room fire, between that and the open window, would have all its old content for her — of these Maria Domenica was thinking. With the curious picturing power that a woman of her people and class may have, she set out her world, piece by piece, to make a background for her Signorina's coming. The great valley, opening northward from the sea, would lead her here, to the gray house and the garden. In imagination Maria Domenica herself once more was taking that road, driving up in Pascà's wagon, with the little Signorina, a big-eyed child, beside her, seeing again through the child's eager eyes every turn of the way along the great valley, every rut of the cart track along the little unknown valley, and the hill path last of all that they must climb on foot, up and up, from Colla Bassa through the olives.

III

THE cart track to Coll' Alta, turning out of the great route of the Val di Roya, a half afternoon's drive north from Ventimiglia and the sea, led on and on to the north and east, following the curves of a milky little torrent which it crossed and recrossed on old steep one-arched bridges. Through the depths of chestnut and olive woods, sunk deep down between the hills, it turned and darkened. One passed, near the turn from the Val di Roya, an oil-mill, with its great stone wheel, a few scanty vineyards and bits of gardens terraced out of the hard hillside, a few cabins, yellow-gray and green as the hillside, built of the hillside's own stone and moss, and then there closed in about one absolutely the infinite solitude of the hills. The little Florida, in many an hour of loneliness long afterwards among people, was to think of this hill solitude and long for it. On and on through the solitude the beauty of the drive increased and grew intenser. And suddenly one came, to one's exquisite surprise, always, no matter how often one had done it before, round the last curve of the narrow valley upon Coll' Alta and its castle.

Bastions and battlements and towers, the castle reared itself against the sky as one looked up to it. The castle and the little yellow-gray walled town crested the hill at the closing of the valley, the terraces of the castle's gardens showing green above and beyond the campanile. There was no knowing, in that unsought-out and unrecorded country, just when castle and town were so built, high on the hilltop commanding the valley, but it was in a time when the campanile must serve as church-tower and watch-tower too, — a tower of faith and a tower of fear; when the houses

must huddle close to protect each other against barbarians and pirates up from the sea. The outer walls of the outer ring of houses were built solidly molded and bastioned together, to make a defense all round, that castle and town might stand shut in fast together and fight against the world. Castle and town together, as one looked up to them from the last turn of the valley road, were cut out of the hill's own self of stone, worn into place upon it by centuries, inseparable from it, and belonging to it as absolutely as its rocks and olive woods.

That exquisitely close relationship of man's life to the soil which one feels in all old, slow-grown countries made beautiful this town at the top of the valley. It had the coherence and harmony that are peculiar to things which men take directly and rightly straight from the earth and by long use fit their lives into. From the last curve of the road one looked up to it as to some beautiful thing Nature had made and only lent to men, and in certain lights, with dawn behind it, or the sunset light reflected upon it, it seemed to be not real at all, but something that one saw as in a dream.

The cart track ended where a half-dozen houses were heaped together at the foot of the hill. That was the town of Colla Bassa. The diligence crawled down from it every morning to Ventimiglia, and back again at night, so that the name of Colla Bassa was known out in the world, but the name of Coll' Alta had no travel. To reach Coll' Alta, on the hill, one left the road and Colla Bassa by the house of Pasquale, or Pascà, driver of the diligence and owner of a carriage. One climbed up and up, through olive woods, by the mule-path that had been the only way of approach to the town for surely a thousand years. No doubt the Romans had used it, and probably the

Ligurians before them, and perhaps, earlier yet, the dimly known Celtic people, who had left their traces through the region in the names of their strange gods upon mountains and rivers, as well as in the caves, the harioli, where one still might fancy their priests carrying oak branches and sacrificing white bulls with chant and lyre. It was a long climb up to the paese, and the path was as rough as the bed of a torrent, but looking back from each turn of it, one saw the hills opening away in differing, lovely vistas everywhere.

Halfway up was the low gray house, standing by itself in its walled and terraced garden, where Florida had lived as a little girl, and beyond that the path climbed steeply on, through olive woods again and scraps of garden, to Coll' Alta. The town rose out of the olive woods, almost the color of them, blurred dimly by the wetting of ages of rain and the fading of ages of sun into half tones of blues and greens and yellows that softened into the gray of the olives. Sometimes, when the sunlight lay upon the broad massing of roof and wall, blocked in plain and bold as in a sketch by some very great master, the town gave back a warmth of color almost golden, the apertures of the unglazed windows cut out in dense black from the highly lighted values of the walls.

Roof upon roof against the hillside, no two houses clinging to the same steep place, wall behind wall, Coll' Alta climbed to the castle gardens, built upon what once had been its moats and defenses. The gardens hung over the town, green with the gray-green of such trees and shrubs as will live in the mountains, the four towers standing up tall among the tall cypresses. Looking up to town and castle as one climbed the path, one got vividly a sense of the curious isolation and the long sufficiency unto itself of this old fortress.

One went through the Porta Vecchia into Coll' Alta's walled-in tangle of streets, all of them steep and climbing, some of them mere flights of steps, all arched over against earthquake and hung across with washing that seemed never to be finished, — dull-colored rags of things strung across from window to window, the Ligurian hill villages having little of such dress as splashes the streets of most Italian towns with bright color. In a way, the life of the streets and the piazza was dull-colored too, without the vivid, Southern abandon supposed to be typically Italian. The town had, one might have said, for the rest, little to make the climb up to it worth while, though here and there was a bit of fine old ironwork, some spandrel or balcony or ferriata, some quaint shrine with statuette and oil lamp; and in the piazza there was a thirteenth-century fountain, a great half-circle of basin into which the water fell through the center of a sun, carved, with the Signs of the Zodiac about it, in the wall, between two old yellow-gray houses. The water, brought by an age-old aqueduct from a spring in the castle gardens down into the piazza, was drawn there from the fountain for the whole town, the women of the paese coming to fill their great copper water jars there, balancing them on their heads, and going their ways, rarely lingering to gossip.

One house in the piazza — the house opposite the church, where Chichetta Possi lived, and where the Stranger tarried on his vague way for a time — had, set in its outer wall, an early cinquecento shrine, — a pierced slab with graceful ornament in very low relief, wherein stood a poor little modern plaster statue of St. Francis of Assisi, with an inscription, of which one could make out only the word "Sole," at the saint's feet. As a little girl Florida had always loved this St. Francis, the brother of the flowers and the

birds, and in that winter when she came back from the world she could not stand any longer to a life strange and more intense than anything she had ever imagined, she liked to look up at the brown saint standing there, and think how he went among people, barefooted, with the rope about his waist, holding his scarred hands out in sympathy. In that winter, when lights burning all night long in the castle windows, where since any one remembered there had never been lights before, meant things to Florida that seemed sad, infinitely, she liked to think of St. Francis climbing the steep path to the castle.

Opposite St. Francis the Via delle Acque led from the piazza, through the Porta delle Acque, out to a path that followed up along the castle walls. The water from the castle gardens was carried down along the path through the gate, and along the street in an open stone channel, to the piazza fountain. A gate in the wall above the town, up past the lavatoio, where the water was caught off into a long trough at which the women washed their linen, stood usually open to the garden. There was an archway, with a stone arch and jambs, the ancient barring for the gate yet visible, and on the right hand, still plainly to be made out, the arms of the Flaviani and the date 1177. Florida, as a little girl, going through the gate into the garden, where Gianin, the hunchback, let her wander at will, always felt that the castle belonged to her, as perhaps it did in the true sense of possession, despite the arms of the Flaviani. In all her years, nobody else had ever come to the castle. The family, living in Rome, seemed to give no thought to it. The agent rented out the lands, or worked them, and old Gianin took some sort of care of castle and garden. Owls and bats and swallows lived in the battlements. Flowers rioted in the crevices, and little

Flori got pleasure all alone out of such like wealth as the old place gave her. Strange, heroic, mysterious things she read into it, stories scarcely more make believe than her own life in those days. For Flori the long-gone lords of the castle were alive still, and the stately ladies. She knew all Gianin's stories of the once great Marchesato di Coll' Alta, and of its cinque comuni, and of the lords who held it forcefully. She lived all the stories over, and this lord was her friend and that her enemy, this lady she loved dearly and that lady she quite grimly hated; and to go through the gate into their castle or peer into the dusk of their big dismantled rooms was to pass under a spell.

The place too was under a spell. Come back to it, grown up, Florida was still to feel it. Wandering the gardens with the Castle Lady, as the people called the present occupant, passing long hours in the rooms, no longer darkened and dismantled, she nevertheless often felt herself in thrall now more even than she had as a child; only now, as the child had not been, she was afraid. The castle and garden she came back to were full of that something, both beautiful and dreadful, which one feels in old, forsaken places whose past has been great and whose decadence holds memories proud and tragic. Florida, coming back to the place, was to feel there especially that beautiful and nameless influence which Italy has for certain people, whether her own or strangers; that something indefinable which one feels in all the beauty, coming upon one in sudden waves, as if dark old glories and evils, old passions and frenzies, were circling in the air about her with the gusts of odors from the ancient walls.

There was something of such malia, intense but never to be explained, strong upon Maria Domenica

now, all that day of her waiting for the Signorina's coming. Without reason she was afraid, not for herself, but for her nurse-child, and at moments her fear was very black. At moments again she saw the little Flori, long-legged and pig-tailed, flying from all danger to her arms, comforted by a piece of bread with butter and sugar on it, and the command to run help Bacè in the narcissus bed.

IV

THEY went down to meet her at Colla Bassa in the afternoon, that was all blue and soft among the hills. The russet chestnut trees of the valley and the yellow-gray olives drooped with the weight of dampness; the tree trunks were black with the wet, and the path down the hillside was washed like the bed of a mountain torrent. The cart track was deep in mud. Pascà's carriage would have to crawl all the way. The terraces too were badly washed and channeled; summer had gone from the road edge, leaving it brown and yellow-gray; everything smelled of autumn. The one little street of Colla Bassa was steaming wet under the day's warmth. The chickens, dogs and babies tumbling about the door of the "trattoria del sole levante" reveled in chocolate mud. The river had overflowed so badly by the bridge that all of a little garden on the left bank there had been washed away, and the people of the garden were gathered dully, weeping to a sympathetic audience, in the one little dark room of the inn.

Both Bacè and Maria Domenica wore their festa dress, he his red sash and black cap with the tassel, she her fine yellow apron and blue handkerchief, as they waited at the inn for the Signorina. She was a handsome woman, Maria Domenica; her fifty odd years be-

came her well. She stood tall and straight, and held her iron-gray head splendidly, like a woman of people accustomed to carry water jars and conche balanced on their heads. There was bitterness in certain of the lines about her mouth, and the melancholy of her people was in her eyes; one saw in her eyes how easy it would be to make an enemy of her and how little one she did not love could trust her; but with the very thought of her Signorina all the devotion and loyalty of her people when they love came into her face, and it was like that of Saint Elizabeth in Marrioto's one great painting. She waited at Colla Bassa in Pascà's little inn, before which the carriage would stop, sitting straight in her chair, her hands in her lap, her face rapt.

Maria Domenica and Bacè had come down so early, in their anxiety to be in time, that they had long to wait.

Bacè talked to everybody over the red wine he ordered while they waited. He bewailed with its people the ruin of the little garden; snarled with them against fate and against the rich who do not help; threw bits of bread to the scrawny chickens that picked about in the mud at the door. The little solemn-faced, gray donkey, that the Signorina was to ride back up the hill, stood ready saddled, stamping and spattering in the mud at the door. All the dogs and babies of Colla Bassa tumbled about there in the mud with the chickens. Children came out from school and filled the road with the shuffle of their wooden shoes and their shrill voices as they played catch-catch and blind fly and "la bella Genevose," dancing in a ring:

"Oh, la bella Genevose,
Va vestita alla Francese,
Alla luna così bianca,
Fa la riverenza,
Fa la penitenza,
D' in su, d' in giù,
Da un bacio a chi vuoi tu."

The bells rang Ave Maria. Pascà's wife put her handkerchief over her head, and went up the street to the church. Behind the caffè the men played pallone till it was too dark to see. In the last light one heard their voices: "Trenta dua, trenta quaranta, trenta chi batte, quindici chi ribatte —"

Pascà's wife came back and lighted the lamps in the little close room. The diligence was due only at seven, she said, nineteen o'clock, but the carriage they had sent down especially for the Signorina should be in well before that, bad as the driving was. The men came back from their work in the olive-mill, and she served their bread and wine and cheese for supper. Bacè joined them, but Maria Domenica could not eat.

The mothers and the little big sisters gathered in the babies, and the road before the door was empty, the hillside across it growing dim in the gathering mist. The men filled the little caffè with their nightly quarreling. They shut the doors, because the night was cold in the valley, but the air remained quite clear in the caffè; there was no tobacco smoke to cloud it: nobody had money to buy tobacco. It was in that the poverty spoke most. Their shadows were gigantic and grotesque upon the walls as the men quarreled — quarreled over the number of dead flies that stuck to the calendar under the lamp, over which way the cat would jump when somebody let go her tail in the middle of the table. Two men, quarreling over their dice, raised their voices above the others. One of them stood up, and the other too, facing him. Chairs scraped back. There would have been trouble soon. But the door opened and a man stood there, slight and tall and quiet, rough haired and eager eyed, a person to be reckoned with, in his collarless red shirt, — the Stranger.

"What now?" he said; "a quarrel among your-

selves when you have all the world to quarrel against you?" He flung back his fine head and laughed at them all, and began to sing, in that voice of his that never failed to set them all to singing:

"I signore, per cui pugniamo,
Ci han rubato il nostro pane—"

A woman came to the door the Stranger had left open.

"Bacè, Maria Domenica, here is the carriage and the Signorina."

V

SHE had broken things down, and torn things up by the roots, and burned things behind her, and nobody had known. It seemed to her very strange that one could suffer as she had suffered, and the people close about one not in the least know. There had been very few hours of it. There had been tea in the Haunt's Manor drawing-room, and the certainty, as she stood holding the duchess's tea-cup, that she could n't go on. There had been the tramp in the wet dark with Bob, and the queer crossing of paths with Illsboro; the hour with Alicia, and then the long evening, from which Illsboro's coming back stood out in such vivid contrast from her own going away; then the trying to make Jack understand, and his not understanding, and a night of pain, prisoned in her room; the coming of morning in mockery after such a night; the saying good-bye to Evelyn, — Evelyn, at the moment Florida ran in, having her hair shampooed:— in an odor of "Jockey Club," while the maid stared, Florida telling her simply, "I'm going away," and kissing her through a tangle of wet blonde curls; — "Really, you're too frightfully queer," Evelyn's whole comment upon it all.

Other women left their husbands because of this great thing or that; she had left Jack because of an infinity of little things. Other women left importantly, with some geste that was telling and final; with some definite, dramatic leave-taking. For her there had been only the "flattest" possible little going away. She had not tried, after that one trying, to make Jack understand. He had taken it so for granted that it meant nothing to her to leave him and all their life, that — for just the reason that he did n't care, and that, without his caring it was impossible for her — she had n't in the least been able to tell him how much it meant. He had said good-bye to her, and been "sweet," on his way to follow Alicia, and Bob had seen her off at the station, and there it was. The pain of it left her deaf and dumb and blind. It was as if she had died when she said good-bye to Jack, there, with a lot of people about, in the hall, by the green dragon vase and the bronze Siva. She threw all she had left of hope into just the flat little appeal that he should come with her to the train. She might have known, she did, indeed, know, and yet could n't help staking her all on the hopeless chance of it, that he would not. He would be following Alicia down to the peacock cedars, where she had gone, after a tearful good-bye to Florida, with Gerrard Illsboro. That, and the very evident something there was in it, seemed to be what wholly absorbed him in the last hour. He had said: "But Bob will motor you over, won't he? And anyway you 'll be quite all right with Manson; keep her at least till you 're safe there." And he had added, — the half loaf, so terribly hard for her to throw away: "Good-bye, little girl; take care of yourself." If only he had n't said that . . .

Of the long journey out she retained no more than a dusty, aching, deadly-tired, incongruously amused

impression; amused, in the dreary, grim little way in which one clutches at amusement over the edge of the worst pain, by the sooty smudge that, from Calais to Ventimiglia, had turned to burlesque the offense and disapproval and injured dignity of Manson's long thin nose. Poor Manson, about to be left in the very unpleasant Ventimiglia station, to await the train home again, furnished, absurd as it was, quite the most valuable of all her good-byes. "I feel that I shall never see you again, madame; at least never the same as now, madame," she said, her nose a red, quite suddenly tearful background for the smudge. It had been surprising of Manson to weep, and nice of her, but it had come too late in the day to matter. Florida had been able to say good-bye to her only a little kindly, as she turned away to her "Ivory Tower."

But there, in the Ivory Tower, in these first five days after her coming back to the garden house, Florida had something to be set always quite apart from the rest of her life. They were days of such azure after the rains as autumn rarely brought to the hills. A space of dim azure, five days wide, utterly separate, a land where it was always afternoon, where it was exquisite to lose oneself and to forget — she would not have believed that she could so forget. Even of this life into which she had come back, she had forgotten all but the going under into depths of azure and purple dreams.

She did not go once in those five days out of the garden, or see one of her old friends of the paese, or even ask about them. She was so tired that she did not care. She was so tired that she did n't even care — only once, in all that time, one dreadful night — about what had happened to her, about Jack, or anything. She scarcely spoke to Bacè and Maria Domenica. They moved through the azure haze of those

long five days, as far away from her, and as unreal to her as the marionette people in Evelyn's drawing-room. Everything, — the colors of the garden, the mere outlines of things, the shapes of the hills, the colors of the distance, — all melted away into blue haze and forgetfulness. All the sounds of every day melted away into it, — the scraping of Bacè's rake on the paths, the footsteps of Maria Domenica about the house, the bells from the paese, a hatchet ringing somewhere in the olive woods; and all the smells of every day — of heliotrope and sun-warmed earth in the garden beds, of Bacè's pipe and Maria Domenica's cooking — drifted and melted and merged into the blueness. Very intense upon Florida was that indefinable something that makes Italy different from other countries, gives it the sense of all things being storied and sadder here than in other lands, — a land in which to lose one's own sorrows and sink them in the depth and sorrow of the ages.

As from a great distance Florida watched Bacè working in his garden, moving about among the things that needed him, coaxing and forbidding, providing and defending; or watched Maria Domenica at her tasks as if in a dream. Both of them seemed so far away through these first days that she half wondered if she really heard their voices, or saw them at all through the distance.

But on that one dreadful night — it was her fourth night back in the garden house — she dreamed that Jack came there, tired and travel-stained and glad to find her; came into her room, that was in the dream just as it really was, and stood in the doorway, saying to her: "My little girl, I could not do without you." She woke, starting up to run to him. . . .

It was the worst thing that had ever happened to her. The fire was still burning, the room was full of

soft, thick, dimly red gloom. The sweet cold air and the stillness of the November night came in at the windows. The agony of grief that belongs to the night times, the specially intense sensation that a dream can leave, came to her then. Pain came and stifled her, and it was as if by a great struggling against pain that she sat up in her little white bed under the blue Madonna.

If he had never been sweet, — if only he had never been sweet! He had not been, that last day, till the last minute. He had blamed her for Alicia's avoidance of him. He had been jealous of Illsboro with Alicia, and he had punished Florida for that. He had said ugly things, that she must always remember; but at the last minute he had forgotten those things, and had said: "Well, little girl, take care of yourself." And that was just the bit of bread she could not throw away.

The firelight showed her all the room. Maria Domenica had put a bowl of narcissus on the table at the feet of the blue Madonna, and must have toiled long over the old vague mirror to get as much of the cloudiness out of it. She had polished the bronze lamp till it shone like gold, the bowl of three beaks, the long rod with the ring handle, the chains that hung from the handle between the beaks of the bowl, the scissors, the pick; the extinguisher. She had made the red tiles glow and the dark woodwork. The firelight showed all the detail of her care. And her care seemed to Florida at that moment merciless, it so made her realize what it was to be cared for, and how Jack had n't cared. It meant a trying to help her, and Jack had never tried. It made her know how much Jack's love could have meant, and how little, how horribly little, any love else could ever mean.

She got up and went to the open window, looking out into the night.

The castle towers and roofs stood black against the quiver of the stars, and Florida saw that, oddly enough, a whole line of windows in the castle was lighted. She wondered if old Gianin could be ill — but even then they would not have lighted the great rooms. Perhaps the family were there by chance, unless the ghosts had tired of darkness, and had set torches in the old wrought-iron brackets. Some one was watching the night out there, too. Many fantastic explanations came to her. So strange it was, what might not it mean in the way of strange things? Perhaps some soul unhappy as her own was watching the night out there. It gave her a curious sense of companionship to feel that some one who was unhappy, like her, unhappy with her, was keeping vigil there.

She dragged a chair over to the window, and wrapped herself in the white fur rug, and sat watching too, all night long. All night the lights burned at the castle. She looked to them all night. She had never wanted companionship as she wanted it that night, and in some way she got it from the unknown trouble behind the lights in the castle windows.

The lights went out at dawn, one by one. Some one who all night had watched as she had watched, wishing "Would God it were morning," took up the day, as she must take it up, with a "Would God it were night." The lights went out at dawn, and she was left more than ever lonely.

Some time that day, when in the blue haze she happened to think of it, she asked Maria Domenica: "Could Gianin have kept lights burning all night in a whole row of windows up at the castle? Is he ill? Is anything wrong there?"

Maria Domenica drew dark brows together. "Something is very wrong there," she said, in an odd sort of way, as if she did not want to say it; and added: "But not with Gianin."

"Something wrong and not with Gianin? Who else is there?"

"I do not know who they are," said Maria Domenica, moving uneasily.

"There are strange people living in the castle? Then it has been let or sold?"

"Let, since nearly two years." Maria Domenica stopped, but as if there were more to tell.

"What are they doing here? Who are they?"

"It is said," hesitated Maria Domenica, "that they are English, great people, a lord and lady. They are very rich. I know no more of them. The lady scarcely comes out of the grounds. The gentleman has gone away."

"What is the name?" asked Florida.

"An English name no one can pronounce."

"But what is wrong about them?"

"Who knows, Signorina?"

"Why should the lights be burning all night long?"

"Who knows, Signorina?"

"But if something is wrong, and the lady is alone there at the castle . . . ?" Florida thought of the unknown trouble that had watched the night out with her. "Perhaps she is unhappy, or ill; perhaps one could do something?"

"She has plenty of French servants," said Maria Domenica, and went on, as if against her own will, to tell of it. "She had to get them from over the frontier; no one of the paese will work for her. Gianin stays on because he has lived in the castle all his life, and all his people, always, and he does not

know how to get away. And he is gobo, he need not be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Who knows, Signorina?"

"But if something is wrong, Maria Domenica, one should know, one should do something —"

"There's nothing to do, Signorina. She does not need anything. She is a very great lady. She has wealth to buy herself any help she needs." As she said it, a bitterness came into her face. "She has meat, that she never touches, served her twice a day," said Maria Domenica; "think no more about her."

She half turned away and then turned back again, and said, speaking savagely, even to the nurse-child she loved: "There is enough suffering that you can help, Signorina, without worrying about her. Never has there been so much poverty and illness as now in the paese, or such want. For two years, ever since the castle people came here, the olives have failed; this year the fruit crop failed, and last year it was the vines. You will find many people, Signorina, for whom you can do something. Let be the lady of the castle."

She turned sharply away. Something that seemed vaguely strange about it all made Florida turn away too, tired enough not to care just then about the castle lady.

To-morrow she would go to the paese and find her old friends she had neglected. She would find the reverendo, Father Filippo, of the rosy, dull old face; and Maistro Galu, the Government doctor, — Maestro Gallo in proper Italian; "Master Cock," called so, and nobody knew if he had another name, because he had a stiff comb of red hair, and a long neck that he poked out when he walked, and a quick hopping step. They had been friends ever since she was a

child. 'And she would go to see Toinetta Ranieri, who was married now, and old Soeu' Teré, the witch; and snappy, good Chichetta, who lived in the house of St. Francis. To-morrow she would go to them all.

VI

It was well into the night, perhaps eleven o'clock, after Florida's fifth day back in the garden house, that Gino Vanini, the Stranger, came there.

It was a night of mistral. The soft days were over. At sunset the great northwest wind had leaped upon the world, and beat upon the hills and shrieked through them, making all life crouch down under its fury. Florida had always been afraid of the wind. She remembered afterwards how, that very night, she had been afraid of what might happen to one in the midst of it. If Vanini knocked at the door which led from the garden to Florida's sitting-room, the sound was lost in the wind's noise, and it was all suddenly to her that the door was flung open and the man swept in, out of the darkness. The wind shrieked in too, whirling in dust and dead leaves and broken twigs from the garden.

She sprang up from where she sat reading by the fire, and turned to him, and to the sudden madness of storm that entered, making the smoke from the hearth leap out to meet it and driving the ashes through the room.

The man was struggling to get the door shut against the wind. The wind fought him like a live thing. The lamp flared wildly upon it all, and then went out, and the room was quite dark. In the darkness for an instant Florida heard his hard breathing.

He had been struggling with the door, his back

turned toward her, all the minute that the light lasted. She had only seen that he was quick and long and thin and bareheaded and roughly dressed, and that his hands, long and thin like the rest of him, were very strong in their struggle with the door.

"What is it?" she demanded, standing in the darkness; "who are you, what do you want?"

"Come at once, Signorina."

He was striking a light. The blue spurt of the match showed her his face, and, as he came across the room through the smoke, sheltering the flame with his curved hand, so that all the light was upon his face, she had time to see that it was a young face, haggard and urgent, and to wonder what made it beautiful.

She stood drawn back from him against the wall.

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

"Help me with the lamp," he said.

"What are you doing here?"

His match went out. In the darkness again, he said: "I have come to fetch you, Signorina." He struck another light. "Help me with the lamp," he said again.

She brought it to meet him, and held it while he set the match to one of its three wicks.

"There's not a minute to lose," he said; "have you a hypodermic syringe? No? Have you solution of ether, or strychnia? No? You must have brandy; bring that. And a kettle with a lamp under it, the sort you people make your tea with. We can't light the fire because of the wind. Bring your scaldino. Bring whatever you can think of, and hurry, the child is dying."

He went out by the corridor door, calling *Bacè*.

It never occurred to Florida not to do what he told her. She ran up the three steps to her room and got quickly together the things that he had told her to

bring, taking too the blankets from her bed, and catching up her cloak as she left the room.

She could hear Maria Domenica's voice in the passage, protesting: "Not the Signorina, she must not go — such a thing! I will go, but not the Signorina."

"You can do no good, you know that," Vanini was saying; "they would take no heed of you. I tell you they are quite mad. The reverendo is there, and they will not listen even to him. They drove away the doctor. The hag does her spells, and they all rage and wail, and the child dies. No one who is of themselves can help. It must come from outside. There is only the Signorina."

Florida came to where they stood at the main door of the house. There was Bacè with his lantern, and Maria Domenica wrapped in her red shawl.

"I've brought what I could find," Florida said to Vanini. "I've my flask. Bacè, is there more brandy?"

"We have it," answered Vanini.

"Don't come with us," begged Maria Domenica of Florida, and held out against Vanini; "she cannot bear it."

Vanini said: "Come, Signorina."

He opened the door, and the fury of the wind caught them up, lashing their faces.

It was of no use trying to talk as they struggled up the mule path. Bacè carried the scaldino full of burning wood embers. He had to carry it very carefully in both hands, sheltering it from the wind that it might not be put out. Vanini carried the bundle of things in the blanket. Maria Domenica went ahead with the lantern. Its light traveled the stones of the path and its rough edges, the scant grass and the great twisted roots of the olives. The world rocked in the wind against a sky that was vividly clear and

full, crowded with stars. Florida set her teeth and kept her head down and fought the wind. They had to fight their way quite up to the paese.

At a miserable little cluster of houses, built of mud and stone and roofed with stone slabs, heaped one against another, under the town walls, outside the Porta Vecchia, they stopped.

From inside came a sound of wild voices, confused with the wild sounds of the storm. There was a crowd before the door of one of the houses, and in the path figures and faces showed grotesquely black and white, swaying and swinging in the light of lanterns.

The steep incline of mud and stone, sloping from the cabin door to the upper level where the goat lived, hooded all the little light that came out from the door of the room where the people lived, under the goat, and the light concentrated thus, thick and yellow, upon the press and stir of the crowd.

The crowd swung from the steps of the open doorway back about the newcomers.

"Here is the Signorina. He has brought the Signorina," they called.

"Let us pass," said Vanini, not giving Florida time to question.

Of the voices that came from inside the house, two rose above the others, as against the background of a chorus, making some wild duo of a man's cursing and a woman's violent sobbing.

Vanini, still holding Florida's arm, forced a way for her through the crowd and down the few steps that led below the level of the path directly into the one room of the cabin.

"There was only one thing to do," he said, speaking in English; "I told them you had spells against the Evil Eye. It was the only chance."

He pushed her ahead of him down the steps to the door, and all the people in the room turned to her. For an instant then nobody moved. Voices stopped. Everything was motionless, soundless as in a picture. The little low-built room was packed, stifling for all the bitter cold, by people who seemed to her to be not just men and women who were angry and afraid and suffering, but anger and fear and grief themselves personified. She stood looking upon a thing that was vivid and crude enough.

The only light in the room was that of the usual bit of lint floating in a glass of oil and water on the shelf beside the crucifix. In its yellow gloom the mud-plastered walls, the rafters black with smoke, the hearthstone hooded with clay under a hole in the wall, where the fire had been built and had been put out, beaten and scattered by the wind; the firewood piled in the corner, the chickens roostings upon it; the bed heaped with everything but coverings; the table and bench pushed back against the wall; the people's miserable clothes and miserable faces, — all showed uncertainly as through some heavy glass. There was one dark low-browed man who stood in the center of the room, and a grief-convulsed woman who crouched on the floor at his feet, gazing at the little, blue, pinched face of a sick baby in her arms. The wrinkled face of an old hag bent over something in a copper bowl near them, while the old, dull peasant priest stood by helplessly with a vessel of holy water in his hand, the faces of the people crowding about the strange little group they made.

Florida had an instant's impression of it all, arrested like that; then every figure moved and every voice broke out again. The woman's wail and the man's curse rose again above the chorus of other voices. The woman cried that her child would die,

no one could save it. The man called curses upon some one who had looked upon it, and whose death should pay for it. Maria Domenica, behind Florida, made the Sign of the Horn.

The old hag on the floor lifted a gray head, and shrieked at Florida: "Go away, go away!"

Voices cried: "But the Signorina has spells, Soeu' Teré!"

Some cried: "Come in, Signorina," and some cried: "You will make her angry, Signorina, go away!"

"Soeu' Teré," sounded Vanini's voice behind her on the steps, speaking past every one else to the old hag with the bowl, "Soeu' Teré, it is your friend, the Signorina, come to help you."

"I will not have her," said the hag, peering through the gloom, "send her away!"

"Go away," said the child's father to Florida, "you will make her angry. She has the eye in the bowl, we have all seen it. Do not make her angry."

The mother on the floor stared up dumbly at Florida. Florida knew her; it was Toinetta Ranieri with whom she had played when they were both little girls, whom she had helped nurse through illness all one winter.

She went to her, the people letting her pass. "Toinetta, don't you remember me?" she said.

Toinetta nodded.

"Go away!" snarled the hag.

"Go away!" said Toinetta's husband, coming nearer.

When he moved the others came close about Florida, not threatening, but saying as he said: "Signorina, it is of no use." They said to her, one of them after another: "She has the eye in the bowl; do not make her angry, Signorina."

The hag on the floor cried: "Go away, go away!"

Vanini still spoke to the hag, looking at no one else: "But the Signorina has come to help you, she has spells that can add to yours. Let her help you."

Then the priest broke in. He was the brave, good priest whom all the town obeyed, but in this thing nobody had heeded him. He held the vessel of holy water — he must have been going through the Benediction of the Angels — in a hand that shook, and his voice shook as he cried out to Vanini: "How dare you come with your lies here? Your presence is an offense to God in a house of death."

No one listened to him: it frightened Florida to see how utterly he had lost control of his people.

They all waited for her, the Signorina, even the hag, now staring silently.

"The Signorina can do great things," Vanini cried, seizing the advantage, and still looking past the priest to the old woman. "She has great knowledge that she can use to make the baby well. She has come from far away, from countries where great spells are known, bringing you help, Soeu' Teré, if you will let her work in her way while you work in yours."

"I want no help," said the hag.

"No one can help," wailed Toinetta. "The lady of the castle looked upon him."

She crushed the half-naked baby close in her arms. Its head fell back over her shoulder, and Florida saw its little face as if it were the face of her own baby suffering again.

A woman with big gold hoops in her ears began to pray very loudly: "Ave Maria, grazia plena."

The priest took it up with a gasp of relief: "Ave Maria, grazia plena." Here was something that he could do. For him it was a spell; he too was afraid. He crossed himself instead of making the Sign of the

Horn, and instead of muttering strange words, like Soeu' Teré, he said his "Ave Maria, grazia plena."

Two or three of the people chimed in with him, but the child's father brought his great boot down with a crash on the floor. "You, Vanini," he cried, "hear my curse upon her who has done this thing! Mary, Mother of God, may the red hot iron turn in her heart! May the one she loves best drive the red hot iron into her heart, and turn it there and twist it!"

The priest cried to Vanini: "Go, it is bad enough here without you."

"I cannot go, reverendo, and leave the child to die," Vanini answered gently. He looked now at the priest, and there was a great wistfulness in his eyes.

"Her death shall pay," cried the child's father, and the mother flung herself forward with her baby, and lay upon the floor. Florida turned to Vanini and met his commanding, compelling eyes.

His eyes were telling her what to do, and that it was the only thing to do. There was no time for arguing or explaining, and no hope in it; a word, and these people would have driven her out as they had driven out the doctor. She took it from him.

"Soeu' Teré, let me use my spells to help your spells. Let me hold my hands over the bowl," she said.

She went to the hag and looked over her shoulder into the bowl. The oil that had been dropped into the water was gathered into a floating clot, which to Florida, in the contagion of the people's fear, seemed indeed like a great eye. Before the hag could stop her, she stretched out both her hands and held them, as she had seen conjurors make passes, over the bowl.

"The words," somebody cried behind her. "All spells have words."

She began to mutter, as the hag had muttered, catching at any first words that floated in her mind.

“London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down,
Falling down,
London Bridge is falling down.”

She crooned and repeated the words, standing up and holding out her hands to all the people watching her. Her dark cloak had fallen back from her shoulders, and in her white dress, she stood, a vivid presence, among these people, as different from them, from a place as far away, as if she had been one of the saints of their church niches, appeared miraculously in the midst of them. They drew back from her, fascinated, leaving for her a little open space by the child and the old hag with the bowl.

“Let me help, while Soeu’ Teré keeps the eye in the bowl. I will work in my way too,” she cried.

Several voices answered: “Soeu’ Teré, let the Signorina help you.”

The hag said: “If it is only to help me — ”

“Only to help you,” said Florida after her.

She went to Toinetta and took her by the shoulders. Toinetta raised a dull face to hers, and said: “Yesterday I bought him a pair of little red shoes in Venti-miglia.”

“Oh, give him to me, Toinetta!” Florida cried.

“I would hold him till he dies, Signorina. There is nothing you can do. *She* has looked upon him. *She* has killed my baby.”

“But he shan’t die,” said Florida sharply. “Let me take him. He must live and be well and wear the red shoes.”

She got the baby from Toinetta, somehow, and into her own arms. Toinetta’s eyes lifted to hers uncom-

prehendingly, like a dog's. The father came and stood close, more distrustful, and the crowd looked their distrust with latent cruelty. She knew, there in the yellow gloom, that they were ready to change in an instant from friendliness to anger. Her eyes turned again to those of the man she knew nothing of, not even his name, not his right here, commanding, nothing but that he would help her to do whatever must be done.

"All of you watch the Signorina," he said, himself watching her, and as he spoke he came to her and opened the bundle of blankets on the floor. The cold swept along the floor from the open door, but neither Florida nor the Stranger dared have the door shut, the people outside would have been angry; nor did they dare take the baby to the bed in the corner, where the people could not so well watch them. That would have made suspicions, and there was no time to fight suspicion. They did not even dare ask the little crowd to move back and give them room. Vanini had slipped the scaldino into the blankets to warm them.

"'Falling down, falling down' — Soeu' Teré, I do my spell close here beside you on the floor," chanted Florida. She knelt and wrapped the baby in the blankets, close against the scaldino, that as yet had scarcely warmed them, so chilled were they. Vanini was on his knees too. With his hands under the blanket, he was rubbing the baby's little rigid cold body with the brandy. "Get some of the brandy down his throat," he was saying to Florida, still in English. "Mix it with water. The jar there in the corner."

The father scowled after Florida as she got the water and mixed it with brandy in the cup of her flask, all the while crooning: "'Falling down — falling down' —"

She knelt and tried to make the baby swallow, lifting its little head from Vanini's arm.

"The doctor would do that," said somebody in the crowd.

The father demanded: "Where's the spell?"

"Can't you get it down?" said Vanini; "get your finger between his lips and let the brandy run down."

"What are you saying?" asked the child's father, shortly.

"'London Bridge is falling down, falling down' —" Florida could not get the little clenched lips open. "I can't," she half sobbed to Vanini; "I can't do it."

"Let me," said Vanini. His hands were wonderful. He got the brandy down the poor little tightened throat. He had rubbed the little body till something of warmth had come to it.

"This is no spell," said the father, in a voice that threatened.

"Wait, wait," begged Florida; "'London Bridge is falling down' —"

"The kettle, hot water," said Vanini, not looking up.

She got the kettle filled, and the lamp lighted under it, chanting all the while. It took terribly long. It seemed as if they could never get heat, as if the child would die before they could warm it. The scaldino scarcely warmed through the blankets. The draught blew the flame under the kettle so that Florida must keep her hands about it to screen it, and the water seemed never to heat. And all the time there must be kept up the pretense, she must go on droning over the nonsense, become dreadful, of London Bridge.

The old hag's muttering joined hers, and the muttering of the priest. The child's breathing sounded

dreadfully through their voices; there was all the time the howl of the wind around the house. The voices of the crowd outside came with the wind into the room through the still open door. Vanini's quick, short orders cut through all these other sounds, and gave Florida a sharp sense of relief. In the midst of the close-pressing little crowd, they were quite alone, fighting death together. They had never heard of one another, and suddenly each was, for an hour, everything to the other. The world fell back. There was no world, only they two were there, fighting death.

Vanini's knowledge of what to do was rapid and sure. Florida felt that she knew what he wanted done as quickly as he himself knew, and the people, more and more, let her do it. Soeu' Teré, huddled over the bowl, seemed to have forgotten she was there. All the others, watching her, must have seen how she cared. She cared terribly. She seemed to be going through, all over again, the suffering of her own baby. The beating of the little heart meant the life of her own baby, passing. She did not know if the night were years long or scarcely a minute. It was for herself she fought the whole night through. Toinetta crouched on the floor and scarcely moved the whole night through; the father stood over them and watched, and the hag kept up her mumbling the whole night through. All the night through people came and went and filled the room with sound and movement. After a while many of them seemed to have gone away. All of those who had stood outside were gone, and somebody shut the door. The priest went away. He tried to talk about something to the people, but nobody seemed to listen. Florida was conscious again that, as he talked, a curiously humble look came into Vanini's face. He took no heed

of anything the priest said, and yet seemed to have a special gentleness for him.

Florida had loved the reverendo since she was a child, conscious, vaguely, even as a child, of the broader ways life opened to her, of her easy touch on things beyond his reach. She had great pity for him, now that she could do what he could not do for his own people. As he was leaving, she sprang up from where she knelt by the baby, and ran after him to the door.

"Reverendo, you will come early to-morrow, it will all be better then."

He looked at her and answered "Yes," patiently and stupidly.

The people left in the room stood and whispered, and drew back, and drew near, more and more letting her and Vanini do what they could. There was terribly little that they could do, only to keep the people away from the baby and get it warm somehow, stimulate the poor little flicker it had left of life and keep the flame in. And for that they must fight hard each moment together. Maria Domenica, after a while, was allowed to help. It was she who got the cheese basket from where it hung from the rafters and packed the baby into it with the blankets and the scaldino. And all the while mistral kept up its wailing about the house; wailing, wailing, all on one long note.

The neighbors went away, one after another. It was Bacè who persuaded them to go. Everything in the world would be right, he said, if it were left to the Signorina. He went, and they went, given confidence by his confidence, quieted by the way he took the Signorina's power for granted, even by the customary, familiar little gesture of winding the scarf about his throat as he stooped to pick up his lantern.

Florida scarcely noticed at the time, but afterwards,

remembering, she wondered rather, that it should have been Bacè and not Maria Domenica who had seen the need of getting the people away.

They went, one after the other.

VII

THEY went, one after another, all but the woman of the gold earrings. She stayed and talked. She had talked the whole night through. Through it all Florida was conscious of her voice, going on and on, and the things she said must have forced themselves upon her understanding too, for she remembered them afterwards.

Toinetta should never have taken her baby to the castle, she said. She herself, Giulin Settinella, had warned her. But Toinetta would show off her baby to the grand lady who had no baby. Never mind what any one said, indeed, the baby should be shown off at the castle. What had she, Giulin, — who had worked for two months at the castle, and knew, — told Toinetta? What had the whole paese told Toinetta that day when she was so pleased because the lady had picked up her baby in the path and hugged him and kissed him and told her to bring him to the castle? And what had they done with the money the lady gave Toinetta that day at the castle? It was cursed money. She, Giulin, had not lived for two months at the castle without knowing that everything of it was cursed. What had Toinetta thought when the lady held him in her arms the whole time at the castle? And had she not known, when at last she did take him away, and the lady stood in the door and looked *and looked* after him, how it would be? She, Giulin, had known the instant Toinetta told her. If

she were Toinetta the castle lady should pay for that look. The whole paese should see to it that the castle lady paid for that look, and for all the evil that had befallen the town since she came to the castle. The whole of the paese should see to it that she paid the full price of the evil that was in her eyes. Over and over again, the night through, Giulin repeated that "she should pay."

Sometimes the old hag nodded and mumbled it after her, "She shall pay." And once, when, in the horrible small hours before dawn, the fight seemed to have grown hopeless, and even Vanini faltered a little, Maria Domenica emphasized the threat with a savage "Ah, ah!"

Afterwards Florida wondered that a superstition almost foreign to these morose Northern people, a race unimaginative, unemotional, reticent, compared with the races of the South, should so have taken hold of them. At the time she wondered at nothing, only fought, with Vanini, forces stronger and stranger than she realized, the whole night through.

When white dawn came in at the unglazed window, there was nothing left but to watch.

"If we can get through this hour," said Vanini, "it will be all right."

They had set the basket at last out of the draught that swept the floor, on one of the only two chairs in the cabin. Vanini had drawn the other chair close to it, and sat with his hand on the baby's wrist.

"Do you understand, Toinetta, Giulin," he said, "the baby will get well?"

Toinetta crept nearer to Florida on the floor. "If *she* looks at him again, Signorina —"

The father pointed with his thumb to Soeu' Teré, nodding over her bowl: "She did none of it."

"There was nothing for her to do," said Vanini.

"It was for the doctor to do, and as you would not have the doctor, it was for us to do. There was no spell, no spell of either hers or ours, you have seen that. You said long ago in the night that it was no spell."

Toinetta crossed herself. Maria Domenica said: "Vanini, it is better one does not talk of these things."

Giulin of the gold earrings began again.

If it were not what they all said, why then did the lady wear that thick veil? Why should she always hide her eyes? Why had she that scar about her throat, that Rina Moti told them of, if it were not to show where the knife should be drawn? Why was she so afraid of the dark that lights must burn all night long, and every night, at the castle? Why did she walk the floor, all night, and all day, and never rest? And to whom was she talking when she was alone and they heard her voice?

She was a big, handsome young creature, the Giulin, and she had a deep voice that somehow carried conviction. It gave importance to what she said, as she told over the evils that had befallen the paese since the lady came to live in the castle. Nothing but evil had come to any one of the paese, since Gian Postilione fell from the castle roofs where he was mending the tiles the very day the lady came to Coll' Alta, and Cassini, only the day after, was so crushed by the giving way of a wall in the castle gardens that he never could leave his bed again. Oh, it was of no use any one's talking to her, Giulin, who knew. Her hands, in vivid gesture, swept away anything one might have said opposing her.

And the child's father took it up savagely. Since *she* had been here the olives had not borne; never had there been two such bad years, and the superintendent of the castle lands had turned off nearly all the men —

"Shame on you, Mimo!" broke in Vanini; "a man like you, to make attention to the women's nonsense."

But he, Vanini, did not care enough, it seemed, to stop to argue. He turned from Mimo's answer to go over and open the door and let the vague white light of dawn come into the room.

"The wind is almost down," he said. "It will drop with sunrise, and then we can light the fire."

Maria Domenica set about laying the fire. She piled wood and pine cones on the flat stone under the hole in the wall, that it might be ready when they could light it. The disturbed chickens flapped down from their roost on the wood pile, squawking indignantly, and shuffled out of the open door.

Giulin went on, moving about the room as she talked, using always that quick expressive gesture to set things vividly before one.

There was Rina Moti, who also had worked at the castle. The lady made much of Rina, because she was young and pretty and in love. She used to give her pretty things to wear. And every time she wore a thing the lady had given her, some misfortune befell her. Perhaps it was not the lady's fault, but one felt strangely about those things. The very day she put on the red dress the lady gave her, her lover came to tell her he was going to America with his cousin from San Remo, and that, anyway, he had never meant to marry her. She did not go back to the castle, not even that night. And she burned the red dress. She was going to have a baby, and the castle lady wanted her to stay at the castle to be taken care of, because her people were so poor they could not do anything for her. But she said she would rather die in the streets.

Florida went over to Maria Domenica where she

knelt by the fire. "You don't believe it?" she demanded. The early light that came into the room through the open door had not driven the strangeness out of it, with the shadows; she wanted to hear her old nurse deny the thing that seemed to belong to the darkness. "You can't believe it, Maria Domenica," she cried; "it's without sense. It's absurd, it's wicked."

The peasant woman, still on her knees by the fire, answered: "It is all that, Signorina, but — there it is. All who have worked at the castle say that the whole place feels as if something were wrong. Every one there is afraid of everything." She looked up at her Signorina from where she knelt. "Signorina, say what one will, where there is fear like the fear of this, there must be a cause. And that one does not know the cause makes the fear worse. One is terribly afraid of the fear." Her words, her manner, expressed it. "Fear has grown from one thing to another, from little things to great things. The fear itself is proof of a reason for it." She got up, brushing off the wood dust from her hands upon her apron. "There is something wrong with the castle lady, Signorina, and one must not have to do with her. Perhaps it is not *that*, what they think — but there is something wrong. It were better not to talk about it, Signorina. There, Signorina, the fire is ready to light, as soon as the wind goes down. And now I will go home and make coffee for us all."

There was intense relief in her turning to commonplace, everyday things. She drove out the chickens and refilled the kettle, and then, wrapping herself up in her red shawl, went off to the sane, useful round of the day.

Giulin went with her, the promise of coffee appealing. Also if the baby were not going to die, and there

was no longer the excited audience the room had held to listen to her, it was not worth while staying.

The door stood open as Vanini had left it, and dawn came in. The wind was almost down. After a little Vanini told Toinetta to light the fire, and it blazed up gloriously, a wealth in the poor room.

Florida, sitting on the floor, could see, out of the door, above the steps, the great trunks and lower branches of the olive trees, dark and grotesque against the dawn. The chorus of sparrows had begun in the tree tops; the cocks were crowing; dogs barked in the paese; the goat stamped in the room overhead. Florida found herself listening for the tick of a clock in the room: often in the nights with her own child she had listened to the ticking of a clock; she connected the sound of it instinctively with suspense. But there was no clock.

Soeu' Teré had fallen asleep on the floor by her bowl. Vanini got up and picked up Florida's cloak from the corner where she had flung it early in the night and wrapped it round the old hag.

Florida watched him curiously. Now that she had time to think about herself, she realized that she was very cold. Her teeth were chattering. She was very tired too. She went over to the hearth and sat down close to it, leaning her head against the wall. And yet a strange exultation had taken hold of her. She was glad that she was cold and tired. She was glad that her cloak was wrapped around the old hag. She was glad that Vanini had not thought of her. That he had no thought of her gave her a sense of companionship in work, in the right to work and to share and to bear. She was worth not sparing. She was fit to go unconsidered, fit for self-effacement, as he was, himself, worthy of self-abnegation.

The light of the fire comforted her even more than

its warmth. All the poor detail of the room it lighted seemed to her in her exalted mood to have taken on a deep significance. The primitive hearth was an altar; the fire upon it burned to the honor of the God of Life. The man's tools of field work against the wall by the door, the woman's earthen and copper vessels by the hearth were all life's symbols. She looked at Vanini as he sat by the sick baby, and thought that so St. Francis would have watched by a sick child. His face, mystic and impassioned, was indeed like the face of St. Francis, as one sees it pictured; deep-set eyes eager and earnest, two deep lines between the straight brows, rough hair squared across the forehead, sweet mouth, and strong, ascetic chin. His spare bent figure, too, was like the saint's. She could imagine his hands, his long thin hands, held out rapturously for martyrdom.

In the exalted moment of that dawn she made for herself an ideal of the Stranger, one which the test of hours and days was to leave him very like. A man who should have lived seven hundred years before to wander barefooted, brown-habited, singing through the hills; always at home and always a stranger; love of the road in his feet that touched it, the lure of to-morrow before him always; love of men in his heart, a great enthusiasm; to-day's need holding him back, to lift a child that had tumbled down, to carry an old man's load of fagots, to feed the little sister birds and love the waters and stones and our brother the sun; one who would turn somersaults at the dusty cross roads that men might mock him instead of esteem him too greatly; who saw his Master in the broad sunlight and walked with God in the road and the street — she saw him so, and never laughed at her exalted fancy of him.

He must have felt her eyes upon him, for he looked over to her and smiled.

Mimo had sat down on the bench against the wall and Toinetta got up and went over to him, and stood leaning against his shoulder. He took one of her hands in both his hands as she stood so.

VIII

FLORIDA would have stayed all day in the cabin, but Vanini would not have it so. When the sky, through the open door behind the olives, was full of dawn, and the paese bells were crashing out upon the dawn's great stillness, he would have her go home to rest, for very likely that night she would be needed again in the cabin. Night would bring back fear, he knew, and danger there. But now the room that had been strange with a passing in it of things stranger than any telling of them, was grown again familiar and customary. They had taken of Maria Domenica's coffee, very hot, and Soeu' Teré had hobbled off warm and happy, and extremely proud, in Florida's cloak, hastening, lest the Signorina should repent her of her gift. The reverendo was back; Toinetta and Mimo had kissed his hands. Vanini himself had fetched back the doctor, Master Cock, him of the government, from whom the people hid their illnesses; medico condotto, futureless, a good little man, not patient as the priest was, but intolerant of these people who made a thing so hard for him and for themselves of life, that was hard enough anyway; and quite as intolerant of himself, who could not better it. Mimo was persuaded, fully, that he had been superstitious, like the women, for one bad hour only, and that he might trust the doctor whom the

Signorina so believed in. Toinetta seemed to understand now, at last, that she must not wake the baby, when he slept quietly, just to hear his little cry and make sure that he was alive, and moreover that she must not take him up to the piazza to show every one how marvelously he had got well, nor yet let the neighbors come crowding in, to try this spell and that. Mistral was up again with the dawn. Mimo had put out the fire on the hearth, and refilled the scaldino. Toinetta had learned to manage the Signorina's lamp and kettle, and heat the milk Maria Domenica brought her from the garden house, and had herself triumphantly made the baby take of it. Maria Domenica would stay till Vanini came back. He would go down with the Signorina to the garden house and then come back and stay all day in the cabin.

Florida and he went out together from the room where they had fought death the night through, down the path, walking as fast as they could in the wind.

In the great wind the world was swept clear, no haze, no dream left anywhere. It was terribly cold, and hard, as Italy can be. The lights upon the world were the brilliant lights that belong to jewels, — topaz and amethyst upon the mountains, where sun and shadows were, and the sky all of sapphire; such hard lights that everything rang in them, clearly, like bells, the colors so intense and crystal that they were almost sounds. The jeweled mountains were cut sharp out of the jeweled sky. The path was made of bronze underfoot, hard and sounding. The gray of the olive woods was the cold, hard, bright gray of steel. There seemed to be nothing anywhere, really, of grass, or leaf, or tree trunk. Florida thought of the visions of the old saints, the country of the blessed, described always in terms of jewels

and of metals, beryl and sardius and emerald, brass and gold.

The path led down through the olives that rang in the wind, and through bits of garden where the wind had overturned the great stone water jars upon the beds of rust and iron and copper-colored flowers; all trampled and crushed under the storm's feet. Florida held her head high and faced all life fearlessly. All life was clear, it seemed, before her, wind-swept and jewel-lighted, like the morning. She felt with a curious intensity. Every sense was quickened. There was an utterable thrill in it all. She responded in every nerve to — she knew not what. Every color, every sound, had an intense importance, a new significance. There was a meaning, a something prophetic, as if the thing that most mattered, whatever it were, were going to happen. The wind-swept, jeweled morning meant gorgeous things. She gave no thought to the tracks of ruin the wind had torn through the olives, or to its trampling out of life in the gardens. The wind had wrought ruin that would mean — she would have known, knowing the land as she did, if she had stopped to think of it — terrible things to the paese, lasting things, and would reach on into the hunger and cold of winter.

"I am glad to be alive," she said to the Stranger. She tossed her head, with the wind in her hair. She did not feel the cold, and did not trouble to keep Vanini's coat, that she had taken in lack of her own, close about her shoulders. A long lace scarf of her dress blew out straight and stiff in the wind. It seemed to her that she could go on all her life being glad to be alive. It was as if she had discovered, as if there had been shown to her, some magnificent reason, unknown to her before, why she should be

glad to be alive. Something quite new to her, that she did not yet define, made all the world different. She was tired beyond any consciousness of fatigue, and the very fatigue she was unconscious of made her mood the more intense, the more exalted. Her whole soul sang in the wind. Her feet seemed borne up in the wind, not to touch the stones. She gloried in victory; she was drunk with victory.

That it was a very poor little life she had fought for that night, that it had been kept on in the world only for labor and dull trouble, for things sordid and brutal and dull, took nothing from her exaltation. She knew not if she were conscious of the discomforts she had left in the little, dirty, cold room, of the comfort awaiting her at home, the hot bath Maria Domenica would have ready, the linen, the fire and coffee, and her room's quiet. She did not know what little influences had part in her great mood.

"I'm so glad to be alive," she said, speaking with difficulty, the wind catching her words. "I had not known how good it was to be alive. I had not known how much I loved people, just people, or how much there was to do for people. *How* much there is to do!"

"Endlessly much, Signorina," said the man; "and the more you do, the more you find to do. It is from morning till night, and from night till morning. There is no time to stop and think. While you stop and think, some one dies, body or soul."

He spoke in short, rough sentences, as she had, in the wind. The wind brought his words broken to her, and gave them a curious emphasis.

"Body or soul, they die, while one thinks what to do. How can one stop to think? One must just do the next thing. Once you begin, you cannot

leave off. You go on and on, knowing that you cannot leave off."

"Now I shall never leave off," said Florida. It seemed to her such a wonderful thing to be able to help, to be needed and loved and thanked. "I never knew before," she said.

"Look at me, Signorina," he said suddenly.

She turned in the path and looked. They stood where a whole, great old olive tree had been torn up by its roots, dragged from their ages-old clutch on the grass of the hillside, and flung across the path. The broken branches made something of a screen against the wind, and she stood in the scant shelter of them. He stood before her, all in the wind, his rough hair blown across his forehead.

"Your eyes are hungry," he said. She remembered the duchess saying that.

"You're hungry for bread," he went on. "What did they give you, your people, instead of bread? Who gave you a stone?"

It was not impertinent of him, she never thought of it as being so, nor even curious. He was taking her into his interest, his love of people, together with all the rest of them, Toinetta's baby and Soeu' Teré, and she wanted it to be so. She wanted the interest, the love of this man in the collarless shirt. She wanted from him the love she would have wanted from St. Francis, from Toinetta, from Soeu' Teré, from — as she herself had said it — people, just as people, who asked and offered, and gave and took.

He went on, urgent that she should understand him.

"It is that I see you have great need. You need people who need you."

"And there are people who need me," she cried out. "I had not known it. You have made me know

it. It means everything, and I thank you *so* — You — Who *are* you?" she asked abruptly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know, Signorina."

He made the movement then to go on, holding aside the broken branches to let her pass, and gave her his hand to help her where the wind raged for them at the turn of the path, and the path, all rutted by the rain and frozen hard in its ridges, was more difficult: only well farther down the hill he went on, speaking perhaps with cynicism and bitterness, and yet all the while with a humility that in itself was pride:

"Ask me *what* I am, Signorina, and that I can more or less tell you."

He did not look at her, but straight ahead of him, as they went down the path and walked on rapidly, his voice expressive of things she did not understand.

"I'm an enthusiast and a failure," he said; "a harmless fool that they call dangerous. Some call me an anarchist because I demand of men, and cry it out as loudly as I can, that there shall be given 'from each according to his competence, to each according to his needs.' And the anarchists scorn me because I can't grasp great things, causes and systems and schemes and theories; because I find so many little things I must do that I can't wait to think of great things; so much to do for beggars that I can't understand their concern for governments and kings."

The path narrowed and he drew back to give way to her. The wind brought her his words now over her shoulder.

"An outcast, driven from some men because I cry 'Give!' and from others because I will not cry 'Take!' I'm in hiding here, marked dangerous by

some because of a Hymn of the Man out of Work that they took to singing in the streets, and the book called *Panem et Circenses*, and certain articles in certain papers; and marked coward by others because, when they would have me out with the red flag in the piazza, I'm always off somewhere, needed in an attic, feeding some old woman her broth."

He was beside her again in the path; the bitterness that was in his voice was in his face too, now she saw it.

"You see, it's absurd, Signorina. An infidel, the priests say; one who can't accept their dogma, and who yet breaks his bread and drinks his wine always, wherever it may be, in remembrance of the Christ. *Ai mi, Signorina!* A vagabond, a fanatic, who gives all he has, all, and might steal, and always begs. A striver who accomplishes nothing. One who will die coughing some day in a dog's hole, while men who cared less set example in the prisons and on the scaffold. This, Signorina, at your service."

She almost understood him. In all the intercourse they were to hold together throughout their strange friendship, she was never to understand him more nearly than she did then. They half stopped in the path. The wind struck at them and screamed at them, the cold clear sunshine showed them each to the other, as they stood there. They had no heed of shadow, and mist, and veil and illusion. It seemed to her, at least, that it all might always be like that, — a friendship, free and proud and strong, open to wind and sun.

She did not know what to say to him, and it seemed to him, apparently, natural that she should say nothing. They went on quite in silence to the gate of the garden house.

When she asked him: "Won't you come in and

breakfast with me?" she noticed for the first time that he looked very tired.

"A thousand thanks, Signorina, but I — I would rather not."

IX

THE castle lady's maid, a smart little unsympathetic Frenchwoman, who got it — it was wonderful how, for they had no language between them — from Gianin, the hunchback, told the castle lady that Toinetta's baby had nearly died last night; so the castle lady went down to the cabin.

Gianin tried, mysteriously, to keep her from going. He seemed much distressed, but would not tell her why.

She went down through the paese in the late afternoon, when mistral, that had raged all day quite mad about the castle, was gone down with the going down of the sun. The people in the piazza and in the streets drew back silently from her with dark looks as she passed. She was used to that, and had set her own desolate enough interpretation on it: it always hurt her, but not more this day than at other times. Even when the crowd about the cabin door turned upon her, the anger in the peoples' faces frightened her no more than ordinarily. She tried to get through the little crowd.

"There may be something I can do," she said to a woman who moved from the steps, threateningly, to stop her. She did not understand the threat. "Is the baby dead?" she asked of them, of any of them.

Nobody answered, and she would still have passed, but the woman between her and the steps raised a brown, lean arm to forbid her, and several of them cried out a dreadful impossible thing at her, and then

a stone some one from the edge of the crowd had thrown, struck her shoulder. She was conscious of everything else rather than of the pain. A child too, quite close to her, caught a stone up, and she covered her eyes with her arm only in time. The stone struck her arm and, though the pain of that too scarcely mattered, she drew back staggering.

She was so confused that, as the crowd blocked the path back to the paese and the castle, she did not know which way to turn. A man's voice, close to her, where she stood with her eyes covered, said some ugly thing to her in the dialect. She stumbled down the path, and knew that another stone thrown after her just missed her, striking behind her in the dust.

Only when she stopped round the turn of the path, and stood, struggling to breathe, while the old clutch she knew very well on her throat began choking her, she took it in that they had all said that she had tried to kill the child. She could not think of anything to do. There must be some special thing she ought to do for these poor terrible people, and for the little child she had held in her arms, and for herself.

The clutch on her throat was so bad that for a minute she could think of nothing but that; then it seemed to her that the best thing to do would be to go down to the garden house and get the good woman there, Maria Domenica, to tell her what had happened. Maria Domenica was not like the rest of them. Perhaps she would not be angry in that strange, terrible way. She went on, rather blindly, down the path that was strewn with broken branches. Where the great old olive tree lay across the path she had difficulty in passing. She was very tired when she came at last to the gate of the gray house garden.

Somebody, who had been sitting on the carved

bench by the well, started, and looked round, and then sprang up and came to her.

"Oh, what have they done?" said the strange girl, who seemed very strange indeed there.

"Is the baby dead?" asked the castle lady, managing, with a good deal of difficulty, to speak at all. "Why do they think such things of me?"

"Oh, I am so sorry," said the girl.

And then the lady of the castle simply could not stand up any longer. "I—I'm afraid you will have to help me," she said, trying to laugh, "to the bench there—"

But when Florida tried to help her she drew away. Without help she got to the bench and sat down, and leaned back against its carved stone. She put one hand to her throat and kept moving her head a little from side to side. "It's nothing," she said, "only I can't breathe very well,—one minute—"

She wore a heavy black lace veil, drawn from the brim of her hat down closely about her throat and chin. Florida could only see that her face was very white, and her eyes like great dark stains in it. If to the castle lady the girl seemed strange in the garden, surely to Florida the castle lady seemed yet stranger. The dark dress and hat and furs and the lace veil seemed to bring back all of the world she had fled from into the garden. It might have been some friend of Evelyn's stopped in to ask if Jack would be a "duck" and come to fill a place at dinner. Her first sense of it had been to draw back against the cypress trees. She had been thinking of Vanini. He might have come to her in the garden there, by the dusky cypresses and the vasca and the strange old well, the "cicogna": he surely had his place in the garden; but this woman who came in at the garden gate seemed to have no right there.

Florida would have let her pass, but something in the way she moved, some disorder of her dress, an odd splashing of dust upon it, a tear at the shoulder, had, Florida suddenly felt, to do with things intense and violent, and strange as if they were some part of last night's fear. She knew it was part of that. Sure of it, she started forward, asking: "What have they done?" They had done some dreadful thing. Some very tragic thing had happened. The castle lady's coming here, and so, to her, touched her with sharp appeal.

"Signora, what can I do?" she asked.

"Nothing, — only a minute, — it was so horrible, — I shall be all right." She spoke in slightly foreign, very soft Italian.

Florida used Italian too. "Signora, let me, at least, unfasten the veil."

"Oh no, no, don't touch me," cried the lady.

"But it's dreadful; you must let me do something," Florida insisted.

"Only don't speak to me for a minute," said the lady.

Florida stood before her, not knowing what to do. Something she did not understand kept her from doing any of the things one naturally would have done, — from trying to make this woman, who seemed so ill, come into the house, or from going there herself to get help from Maria Domenica.

"Please," said the lady, "don't speak to me. I shall be better. And don't touch me."

Florida dropped down on her knees in the grass, and so waited, kneeling; for some reason, she did not know what, afraid to move, as if in moving she might do some hurt.

At the end of a minute that seemed very long the lady sat up erect, steadying herself with her hands on either side of her upon the stone seat.

"It's better," she said, speaking still with difficulty. "Tell me, will the baby die?"

"No," said Florida; "not if they take care of it. But Signora —" she began, and stopped. Again there was the sense of any urgency being cruel. She was afraid of hurting in some way she did not understand. It was like touching, blindfold, some one who had been wounded. She waited, kneeling there. And, after minutes, the lady spoke more easily.

"Why do they hate me like this?" she asked.

"Oh, Signora, it's a mistake; they will come to see. Don't think of it now."

"No, I'm better," said the lady; "wait till I can ask you things." She spoke through little choking gasps. "I must ask you things."

"Oh, please," begged Florida, and waited; and the minutes were dreadful.

When the lady could, she went on, speaking more and more easily. She seemed to be telling the thing as if she had to tell it; from a long need of having some one listen to her.

"It was dreadful," she said. "I heard the baby was ill, and I thought there might be something I could do. There were quite a lot of people outside the cabin door. They called things and threw stones at me. Ah! — I could not understand. I want to understand. So I came here. I will go in a minute; only tell me, what do they mean? They say I tried to kill the child. And I had thought I might love the poor little thing. What does it mean?"

She looked up at Florida through the curious lace figures of the veil, out of her dark stains of eyes. The little foreign touch gave her words an added something of desolation.

"Tell me why they hate me," she said. "I thought I could perhaps love them, and at least do no harm.

And they think I have done harm, and are afraid of me, and hate me."

Her voice, something in the uplifting of her face, in her half-seen eyes, called out in Florida a passion of sympathy. But she had no words for it. She dropped on her knees in the grass before the castle lady, but could say nothing. She wanted to say: "Don't think about it, it is all a pitiful mistake, and we will make it right. We will make them understand. Don't think about it now. Come with me to the house, and let me take care of you. Take off that dreadful veil and rest, and let Maria Domenica make tea for you." But the same dread of things she did not understand kept her from words. She only put her two hands in the lady's lap and knelt silently.

The lady took no notice of her touch.

"Is it what my servants tell me?" went on the lady; "that these people think I give the evil eye? Is that it?"

"Oh, I am so sorry," Florida said, as miserably as if the fault of these people were hers. "Something makes them think a thing, and they go mad with it. They will come to understand."

"Ah!" said the lady, looking away from her over her head, and far past everything. "But it is just that,—that, you see, they *do* understand." She shivered.

Florida put a hand on each of the lady's cold hands, as they lay beside her on the seat of the bench. The lady still seemed not to know she touched her. She went on speaking, with no difficulty now, but rather with relief, as if it were a long time since she had talked to any one, and the words came of themselves almost without her volition or consciousness.

"I thought when we came here, that they might grow to love me. I thought that, if they would only

love me, I could love them. It is terrible, terrible, when one cannot love. I thought I could, again. There was so much to do for them. And the little children. But their mothers call them away from me in the piazza. People scarcely speak to me. No one from the paese will work at the castle. Every one is afraid of me. How stupid of me not to know why. I was so glad that Toinetta was not angry the day I picked up her baby in the path and hugged him because he smiled at me. I forgot things when I held him in my arms. I would have given her anything I owned that day she brought him to the castle. And they think that I have hurt him."

"You must not mind so much," Florida besought her; "please, please."

She had got the lady's hands into hers, and they clung now to hers, piteously, and quite unconsciously.

The lady went on: "When we came here I thought that these poor people would not know. But they have known, all along. They see it in my eyes. They see the evil in my eyes. I thought that, though I had nothing else left, I could have the love of these people I could work for, and who would not *know*. But it is of no use. I harm all things I look upon, and most of all the things I love most — Oh, why are you holding my hands? Let me go!"

She dragged her hands out of Florida's. "I must go," she said, and stood up. "I should never have come. I did not know that you were not one of them. I shouldn't have let you be kind to me. Only I — I did not quite know what I was doing. I am better now. I will go now."

"But you can't go like this," said Florida, standing up too; and pleaded timidly: "Let me do something."

"There is nothing."

"At least let me go back with you to the castle."

"No, you cannot come with me; you cannot. I am quite well enough to go alone."

"Please, you are not well enough. It is dreadful. If you were ill, like this, again?"

"I shall not be." She stood quite steadily, looking up at Florida. She was not so tall as the younger woman, but she stood with her head lifted in an odd way, as if she were facing hard things. As she stood there, looking up at Florida, something in the way she held her head lifted, seemed oddly familiar. "It was only a minute," she said. "I know. It has often been like this before, often, and much worse. Thank you, and good-bye."

"But suppose —" began Florida, again.

"The people? No, I will not go through the piazza, but round through the olives. You have been kind to me. Be yet more kind, and let me go like this."

"I can't!" cried Florida.

It was unbearable. She thought of that night she had watched out, with the lights in the castle windows for company, getting comfort in loneliness from the loneliness of another, who watched too, unknown and unknowing. She thought of the things Maria Domenica had told her, and Giulin Settinella. Her heart was full of a great pity. And to let the woman go like this! "I can't!" she cried.

"You can be kind," said the castle lady; "and there is only one kindness you can do me, — not to speak to me, or see me, or think of me, again."

Florida had never felt herself so helpless.

"I should like to thank you," said the castle lady, "but I cannot. I cannot seem to care enough any

more. You must just be more kind, and let this be all."

And she turned and went down the path and out of the gate.

X

VANINI told Florida of the castle lady when, at the first opportunity, she asked him things; and he used, in telling her, his English labored and pedantic, as if from books, almost the same words the lady herself had used.

"They think this thing of her because evil is in her eyes," he said. "They feel it, though they do not understand it. They understand sin that is cold and hungry and anxious and afraid, and goes dressed in rags and tinsel, — Marietta with the red paper rose in her hair, — sin that hangs about the caffè doors, or beats its breast in the piazza, or hides in a hole. But they do not understand sin dressed in lace and velvet. Something they do not understand looks at them out of the lady's eyes, under the lace veil, and they make the Sign of the Horn. And she, — ah! that is sin! She was a great lady of the great world; she had every defense of inherited instinct, of tradition, of training, of surrounding. She was not like the girls of the piazza, who do what their mothers did, who *must* do it to earn a glass of wine and a place to sleep in. She was not ignorant as they are, of the sinfulness of sin, not unable, as they are, to realize it. She knew what it was that she did. She must have known fully, for she was not so young at the time; she had been married ten years or more to the Marquis de Gramondin —"

Florida's sudden exclamation did not surprise him.

"Yes, you would know," he said; "all the great

world knew. She had friends everywhere. In Rome, in the Corso, on the Pincio; I have seen her, with the lace veil she always wears to hide her face, hang her head under the stare of great ladies who had been her friends. I have heard women of the other world — there was one time at Nice, I especially remember — laugh, as she passed, with her face turned from them, even as the great ladies turned their faces from her. What does she do here, you ask? She hides from every woman in the world, from the fine ladies, and the girls of the gutter, and from these peasant creatures who see evil in her eyes. Who is she? She is sin itself, Signorina, sin incarnate, taking its wages."

"Don't," cried out Florida; "it is too horrible!"

"Yes, Signorina, it is horrible; I wish that every woman in the world knew how horrible. She herself knows. Now is her time of knowledge."

For days Florida kept herself with difficulty from going to the castle. In her great pity for the woman there she would have gone at once to her. Nothing Vanini might have said would stop her, though the lady's own words did. Of Vanini, Maria Domenica told her, without waiting for her to question.

"The man is quite mad," she said, with a gesture signifying confusion. "Nobody knows who he is, or where he came from, or why he came. He walked in one day at the door of Chichetta Possi and her old mother, and there he stays. Sometimes he pays Chichetta money for the room and the food, and sometimes he does work in exchange for it, because he has no money. Chichetta says he will not eat while he knows of any one who needs food, and no matter what she cooks for him, if people come and ask for it, he gives it to them. He gives away Chichetta's food too; he says that if she has breakfasted she

has no right to dine. He gives away his clothes, and wants to give away Chichetta's. He has the whole paese pouring in and out of the house all day and night. Every one wants him for everything. He must make broth for this old woman, and mix medicine for that; there is a child who comes every day to be fed two eggs, and another to have its throat painted with some brown stuff, and another that he may see it is warmly enough dressed, because its mother sells the clothes he gives it. There 'll be a man who has got into trouble with his padrone, and a woman who has had a quarrel with her husband, and a girl whose lover treats her badly, and a boy who has cut his hand and would have it bandaged, and an old crone who must have something warm to wear, and an old man who wants tobacco, and a little girl who must be helped learn her lessons. People who are sick go to him to be doctored, and people who are bad go to him to be got out of trouble, and people who want things go to him just to ask. Whether they're happy or unhappy, they all must go and tell him about it. Chichetta says he's a fool and a saint and a torment, and she'd like to chase him out of the house with four broomsticks; but she does n't know what in the world she'd do without him, and worries about him whenever he's out of her sight."

To Florida, in the days that now followed, stories she had told herself about the castle came back and told themselves again to her, but none of them seemed more to belong to it than this present story of this woman, who hid under a lace veil the evil that was in her eyes. All the stories Florida had used to tell herself as a child about the place swarmed back about her. She remembered the company with which she had peopled the castle, but of all the stately troop of them no one seemed more absolutely to belong there

than the lady of the story she was not pretending. Surely it was just the place in which just such a story might tell itself out to an end. The night she had watched out with the lights of the castle windows had given her a sense of kinship with the unhappiness there. She wanted, with all her heart, to help. But she could not help, except as the lady had said, by doing nothing. She was unhappy about it. She tormented herself about it, and she let Vanini fill the days.

He knew well how to fill them.

"I had been trying not to believe in you, Signorina," he said, when she came back the second night to Mimo's cabin. "I had tried to think that last night was just a moment never to be repeated, that the *you* of last night I never should see again."

"Why did you *try* to think that?"

"I did not want to count on you too much."

"But I want you to count on me," said Florida, intensely alone with him, though Toinetta and Mimo were with them there, close, in the one little room of the cabin.

"And will you always be *you* then? Not only in times of excitement like last night, and in times of exaltation like this morning, but in the every moment? You will not be, to-morrow, some one else, — some fine lady of the world, turning away from us, wondering that ever she could have had to do with us?"

"Oh," she denied, "how can you think it?"

"I dare not let myself *not* think it," he said; "to think otherwise would mean so much —"

"I want to mean much," she said, leaning a little toward him, as they sat by Toinetta's baby, and clasping her hands before her. "I mean so little, as it is, nothing at all, to any one in the world."

He knew she did not realize how much she was admitting. He knew by some sense he had, and was more and more, always, as their friendship grew, to have, in all that concerned her, coming by it to be very near her in their odd intimacy, that she was thinking of some one else while she talked to him. She leaned toward him, not seeing him, he knew, at all, the man in the shabby coat and the shirt without a collar. He knew that it was just that she wanted some one to need her.

"I want to mean something here in this place, to these people, and to you, — please, oh please, — for you can help me to help. And it is only in helping that I can go on."

He took her at her word. On the third day of the mistral, — she was always to think of him, she told him afterwards, laughing, to an accompaniment of rattling windows, smoking fires and slamming doors, — he came to the garden house and demanded it of her.

"You will really help, Signorina? No one can help quite as you could. You come from so far away that it is out of these people's imagining, and with it all you are less a stranger to them than the neighbor from the nearest town. You are so far away that you come near to them, as in a circle; and so different from them that they are unconscious of the difference, and it does not disconcert them. You have gone, as a little girl, into their houses. You can go now, in the same way, but with understanding. And, oh, there are so many little things that are great, to be done for them, Signorina."

She had let Maria Domenica bring him to her in the book-room. She stood quite still and watched him as he talked, walking up and down the floor. He used his eloquent hands, as he talked, to set things in pictures before her.

"There is no one but a stranger who can help these people, Signorina. And no stranger but you would they let help them. Try to make them trust the doctor; they never send for him until it is too late. Try to make them take their sick to him instead of using spells. Try and teach them how to feed the babies, — not that there is anything in the paese fit to feed a baby on, — and how to keep babies and old people warm, at least."

She was amused, he was so unlike any man she had ever known, walking her floor and talking without the slightest self-consciousness. And she was, at the same time, intense about it; here was a thing that made all life seem different, changed life for her, as she looked ahead along it. All opportunity seemed to stretch away for her from a new beginning.

It was, as she had said to Vanini, the love of people, just as people; the love for their life, for all man's life in the world, because it was a thing bigger than one's own little part in it, and yet a thing in which one had a right to share and give and take. She had found that there were people who wanted her. Nobody before had ever specially wanted her. She had never before felt herself close as now he brought her to the real things, the necessary things of life. She had thought to dwell secure and content in her Ivory Tower. She had thought that just to escape from the unreal, the needless things of life would be happiness enough; that just to shut oneself away would be happiness enough. But it had not been enough; in the air castle still she had lacked something. Now it was given her. Now was given her a love for people, — for people who needed, and whose needs were crude and vital, who held out their hands to her, not gloved, so that one could n't feel the touch of them, but earth-grimed, and so more real. It seemed

to her a wonderful thing to have found such a love, and to have found it just in her moment of most needing it. And it was Vanini who had brought her to the finding of it. She liked to think of him with gratitude, though with a half-amused tenderness, comprehensive of all the little differences between him and the men of her other world; to think of him as she saw him here, picturesque and great, in this world that was his own; not in Evelyn's drawing-room, but just here, where he so belonged, with the cabin and the night's battle, the morning and the wind and the everlasting hills.

She could imagine him in the drawing-room, indeed, savagely at ease there; flashing contempt on people whose uselessness he met so in the midst of opportunities. Or, she could imagine him plodding behind his plow and his great white oxen through the Tuscan fields, before some square white farm, set in black cypress trees; or, with wide strokes of the oar, bringing his gondola, loaded with pomegranates, from deep shadow into full gold sunshine round some curve of a Venetian canal; or lying with the lizards under some shaded wall, looking away to Capri adrift on the bay there, a white sail in the azure and a white seabird. Or she could best of all imagine him in brown habit following the Poverello through the Umbrian hills; talking at the cross roads, in the piazza, in the cabins, ages ago, even as he talked to-day, when he came to her, after a way he fell into of coming, at odd moments, unasked and unannounced, appearing, whenever he chanced to care to, at her garden door.

In those first comings there, he took no heed whatever of the charming things that were in the room. It was only afterwards, when he no longer needed to talk to her, when a word or a look was sufficient to

give her of his enthusiasm, that he found time to see what else beside herself was in the room. Then — it was all in an instant — he discovered, for instance, her books, though now while he talked to her of the people he did not even see them.

“Our poor people, they never think,” he would say. “It is so hot in summer that they never believe it will be cold in winter, and the babies and the old people and the sick people die of cold, because no one ever thought to provide. Try to make them understand that the mule feels it when they kick him and beat him, and that neither a mule nor a man can carry more than certain loads. Try to keep the girls from the danger that’s always in wait for them. Try to make the men realize that their babies are their babies, and that they must get them fed and clothed, whether or not they are married to the mothers. Signorina, there is so much for you to do, and when once you begin to do it, there is no leaving off or putting down, and there is no getting, ever, to the end of it.”

So, as the days went on, — days of bitter cold that, coming so out of season, smote the gardens and let misery into the houses, — he drew her more and more deeply into a life unlike anything she had ever imagined. Perhaps her part, like his, in that life, was taken all from the wrong point of starting, and borne on to no purpose. She did not stop, then, to question. There was so much to do, one could n’t stop to question.

There were a thousand and one things he showed her — showed her how to see for herself, one thing leading to another inevitably — that absolutely must be done; this for Toinetta and the baby, that for Soeu’ Teré, for Rina Moti, for the girl Marietta, for so many others.

Florida would spend a whole morning coaxing

Toinetta's little wailing baby to sleep, and then Toinetta would waken him with a sudden snatching of him up to kiss him, and the coaxing would have to begin over again and go on perhaps through a whole wailing afternoon. One day Toinetta would leave the baby alone for hours while she went visiting about the paese to boast of the beautiful cradle the Signorina had given him. Then all night, in an agony of self-reproach for having left him, she would not let him out of her arms for an instant, and would feed him with anything she could lay her hands on. Next day he would be ill, and the Signorina must come, and must not leave him, and she, Toinetta, would sob and pray, not daring to touch him.

Rina Moti would scowl at the Signorina, out of sullen miserable eyes, and say always the same thing:

"I won't make clothes for it. Take away your stuffs. I don't want it to have things. It will be his child, and I shall hate it. Very likely I shall kill it, Signorina."

"No, you will love it," Florida would always say. "You will love it so much that you will want it to have everything in the world. You will love it so much that sometimes you will be glad it is *all* yours, that not even *he* shares it with you. You will be proud to think it needs you, and nobody but you, and that you yourself take care of it, and nobody helps."

One day she went to see Soeu' Teré, who had fallen ill. She lived alone — and the neighbors did what they could for her — in one of the tunnel streets that once probably formed part of the castle's subterranean passages. Her room had no windows and no chimney. She built her fire — when she could build it, and had the wood to build it with — on a round, smooth stone in the middle of the room. When the stone was red-

hot, she swept off the coals and set a lump of chestnut or farina paste on it to heat. Now that she was too ill to mind the fire and the paste, the neighbors tried to do it for her. But they had fires and paste of their own to mind, and each one his own "business and desire."

She went to see Marietta, who responded proudly to her attentions.

Marietta was very pretty with the red paper rose in her hair. When the Signorina sought her at the caffè door she was always delighted to come away. She would flirt her skirts by Florida's side across the piazza, bowing to everybody, and pointing out to the Signorina with great pride those of the men who had been her lovers.

"I could have any one of them at this minute, Signorina, if I pleased. But I would rather go and visit with the Signorina for a little. May I try on the Signorina's corals?"

Vanini would appear of a sudden in the door of her sitting-room.

"Signorina, the maestro says that to-day you may come up to the school and talk to the children; tell them those stories about the beasts, especially about the birds, or that one about the lizard. They would not be cruel — I knew they would not — if one could only make them *feel* that the creatures feel. Tell them the same things over and over, write on the blackboard, and make them write on the blackboard, and make them learn by memory, and ask them questions, and make them talk. You can, you know."

Or it would be: "Signorina, give me ten lire for the rent of an old man's room; they will put him out, and he is so old."

"Signorina, there is a woman very ill who wants you. She has a new baby, and she has to leave it,

for she is dying. She wants you to be there when she goes."

"Oh, I can't, I can't, Vanini," cried Florida to this.

"But you must, you know," said Vanini. "When you are wanted like that, you must not fail. It's a glorious thing to be wanted like that. You must not lose such a thing, Signorina, for any fear of pain."

One day he came very early in the morning to the garden house. He wanted most especially — oh, most especially, he told Maria Domenica — to see the Signorina. Florida hurried to dress, and ran down the stairs to where he waited for her in the kitchen with Bacè and Maria Domenica. He came to meet her, his face haggard and imploring. "*How* I wanted to see you, Signorina!"

"What is it?" asked Florida; "what is the matter; what has happened?"

"Oh, Signorina, nothing has happened; I only wanted to see you. It is such a long time since yesterday." He spoke in Italian, because it would have been discourteous to use the English that Bacè and Maria Domenica did not understand. "I wanted badly to see you, Signorina, just that."

He came often of an evening to the garden house. It seemed he had always been in the habit of coming so, to sit talking in the kitchen with Bacè and Maria Domenica. Sometimes Maestro Gallo, the doctor, came with him, and the schoolmaster, — a rough, bad-tempered, good-hearted, big, brown man. Sometimes the Sindico came too. He, of course, was the great man of the town, — middle-aged and fat and solemn, speaking rarely. When he was silent one felt he was an important person, yet when he did speak no one listened.

Bacè would sit by the fire, whittling olive-wood sticks and humming softly to himself, on those evenings in the kitchen, but Maria Domenica talked savagely with the men of things Florida could only vaguely understand. They talked over and over the tiny, intense, walled-in politics of the town, and Florida got an impression, vague and rather to be shrunk from, of its isolation, its absolute lack of correspondence with the outside world. There was no standard of comparison, no restraint of outside opinion, no safeguard in consideration of the world's observation and judgment. Now, as through the centuries, its life was a thing that reckoned with no world outside. And it was a life that through the centuries had very little changed in customs and manner and spirit.

When the feudal lords had lived in the Tower of Coll' Alta and owned men as they owned lands, citizens and peasants could have stood but little more helplessly before them than now they stood before the officers of the Commune or before the castle steward; and it seemed as if scarcely greater abuses could have arisen, in the old days, from the tenure's dependence on the doing of personal service for the Signori than arose now — among these people living still on lands they might cultivate for themselves, might even transmit from father to son, but might not own — from its dependence on a payment of taxes to the Commune, or to the steward who managed the castle property by what measures he pleased, to his own advantage rather than that of the absent, indifferent masters, certainly in no way for the advantage of the people, who in the old days had been the master's care. To-day the Commune of Coll' Alta let out its public bakery under just as hard conditions as those made by the nobles back in the thirteenth century;

and, though every man's right to bread was a thing talked about to-day as it had not been then, the bread seemed not much more easily come by. The men who talked in the piazza, in the caffè, it seemed, fell silent before the steward or the tax agent or the Communal Secretary, with all the old dumbness of the serf before the master, not knowing how to protest that the office of the Mestoraria connected with the sale of all property belonging to the Commune — oil, wine, olives, figs, the use of the forno and marcello, the letting out of land — gave opportunity enough to repeat to-day the wrongs of centuries ago.

Now, as then, all the town's life was crowded in and walled around, thrown upon itself, with no escape from itself.

Sometimes, as the others talked, Florida grew afraid, not knowing why. It was again the sense that dead things here were not buried, passions and evils, covered however deep, were not extinct. It was as if, in the depths of men's hearts, as if in the depths of the whole of man's life in the town, deep down, but always there for some unexpected circumstance to bring to the top, waited things greatly to be feared. The feeling made all things turn horrible, sometimes, in the bright kitchen where the coppers and the red tiles shone and the fire purred pleasantly.

The doctor and the schoolmaster, both Socialists, managed to quarrel always over every question of the town's management, — the taxes, the army service, the letting of the offices, the letting of the communal oil-mill and corn-mill, the working of the land, the prices paid at the "masaguin" or communal store of the Municipio where the country people brought in their oil and wine and cheese and figs. Florida listened vaguely to this wrangling over troubles hundreds of years old.

The Sindico echoed whichever side got the better of the argument. Vanini would bear as much as he could of their talk, and then, when he could listen no longer, break violently in upon it. Sometimes Florida knew his words went far too wild, and yet the spirit of what he said seemed to her always magnificent. Now sitting by her on the bench before the oven's open door, now getting up to walk the room, he talked passionately of the difficulties which men, since the world was, have been trying to explain away, but which seem only to grow more complicated always. He talked, and Florida listened, like the others, intently, of the remedies great minds suggest, the wide, deep, impersonal schemes the world's thinkers are always evolving for changing social conditions the world over, to the end that every man may get his just dues of food and room to live in. Over and over he would tell how this wise man or that said it was to be done.

Then, in the midst of his eagerness, his argument would break down. His words were such as had caught his imagination and set it on fire, but his understanding of them did not carry through. He was of the Middle Ages, rather than of the time that grasps these things. He tried to talk as reasoners of the day were talking, but he could not, any more than some little brown brother of St. Francis could have done; he came back at the end of every argument, as the brother minor would have done, to the sweet impossible doctrine of just giving and loving. But he knew his own weakness.

"What am I talking of," he would say; "I, a parrot, that has been taught other men's words? Why am I talking, I who cannot think? How can one think, when there is so much to feel? The great things are so far away, and the little things so

terribly near. The whole land system comes down to just this, that Soeu' Teré has n't the right to pick up fagots, anywhere, in all these waste lands, for a fire to keep her alive. The wage question means just this, that the big florists in the big towns down by the sea don't give enough to allow Marietta a bed to sleep in without begging it of some boy in the street. Ah, bah! The more one feels the less one can think. Come now, let us sing, because we cannot think."

In his beautiful, untrained voice he would start them all singing:

*"I signori per cui pugniamo
Ci àn rubato il nostro pane,
Ci àn promesso una domane,
La doman si aspetta ancor'."*

Sometimes, when Florida did not join them in the kitchen, he would come begging to the book-room door.

"Signorina, let me come and sit with you. Talk to me; tell me that life is not horrible, that it is good to be alive, as you said it was, the morning we walked down through the olives. You do not know what it meant to me. All night, there in the wretched cabin, you had been working in your beautiful ball dress —"

"Vanini, Vanini, it was the shabbiest old tea-gown!"

"Don't laugh at me, Signorina. What does it matter? You can't take away the vision I have of you."

Or it might be: "Signorina, come out to the hills, and we will not mind the wind, and run and not feel the cold. Come, tell me how beautifully the wind clears the sky, and how clean the snow is on the mountain tops. I would forget other things."

She knew what he meant to forget — the despair it was to all the town's life when such winds as those that raged ceaselessly and dreadfully all that season, day after day, tore long, wide streaks of ruin through the olive woods, and such rains came after the winds, washing away walls and terraces, and beating out the life of the gardens.

"We must forget all that is cruel," he would say; "come, Signorina, away from the things of men."

Again it was: "Signorina, to-day there is quiet. Come out to the hills; the rain has stopped, and the sky is so near that one sees one's prayers go up to it."

One night, after a day of working hard to save an old woman's garden, buttressing it up against the swollen torrents, Vanini went home late, very tired. His big boots tracked mud up the stairs that Chichetta tried to keep so neat, and his hand left a mark of it on the stone banister. The house was part of what once had been conventual buildings, dependent on the church across the piazza. The ceilings, "a crota," were like those of all the mountain-town houses, always in old time built with each floor laid upon arches, to give added strength against earthquake, and to make each house an integral part in the fortified whole of the town. But in this house there were besides rich bosses set at the intersection of the vault ribs, carved carefully, as such work was done for religious buildings, and the double-lighted, bluntly pointed windows on the stairs were ecclesiastical in all the detail of their deep, careful sixteenth-century molding. Chichetta's rooms at the top of the house contained some good old woodwork, and some bits of furniture, a chest, a tall press, a hearth bench, really fine.

Vanini opened the door directly into the kitchen

and living room, and in the red light that came out from the open door of the oven, and in the yellow light of the two tall candles on the table, he saw the Signorina sitting, with Chichetta and the old mother.

He had seen her, always at her work for the people among whom they worked together, he and she, an accepted part in a plan of life in which he commanded and she obeyed. He had never thought of her before as one whom these people were born to serve; but now Chichetta, little and brown and quick and bird-like, stood up before her, answering her questions with the friendly, yet almost worshipping manner of the Italian servant; while the old mother, too feeble to leave her chair, except with difficulty, sat looking up at her adoringly. The whole thing as Vanini came upon it seemed quite strange and new to him. He stood confused for an instant.

Then without saying anything, all wet and muddy and very tired as he was, he turned from the door and went downstairs and out of the house. He walked half the night in the olive woods.

Next day he was very humble with the Signorina.

"What was it last night, Vanini?" she asked him. "Did it annoy you to find me there? Were you angry?"

"With myself, Signorina."

"Why, Vanini?"

"Does not the Signorina know?" He was speaking Italian, and he used the third person singular for the first time in his speaking to her. "The Signorina does not think that I have reason to be angry with myself?"

"But no, Vanini, why?"

He did not answer, and she went on talking of other things, because that thing scarcely mattered.

There were so many things to talk of, so many plans to make. Vanini was just a part of it all, all the plans were full of him. She did not concern herself with thought of him, why he should be angry with himself, or with herself, or what it was he seemed to have expected her to understand.

They were in the book-room, standing together by the fire. She looked at him without seeing him at all. It was the life he opened to her that she saw, — what he and she would do together in it. They would help Master Cock take care of the sick people, and the reverendo take care of people who were called bad. They would know everybody and love everybody, and she would learn to give as Vanini gave, and to take as he took. They would make all life beautiful.

“We will make it all beautiful, will we not, Vanini?”

“Yes,” he repeated slowly, after her, “we will make it all beautiful.”

XI

THEN after all there came a day when Florida went to the castle, just because she could not bear any longer not to go. To go seemed quite dreadful, after the things the castle lady — Mary Talbot, that she had always heard of, come so strangely now into touch with her — had said and shown to her; and yet it seemed more dreadful not to go. She had heard of the castle lady, in those days through which she kept away from people of the paese — or rather, indeed, not of the lady herself, but of her drawing herself more away, of her hiding herself, it seemed to the paese's fancy, more and more in places black enough. And that desolate withdrawing, that hopeless raising of the bridge, roused in Florida a

sense of chivalry. More and more the thought of the castle lady haunted her, until she could not bear it, and went to her.

She went up to the castle through the paese. She climbed the path through the olives and the bits of garden desolated by the storms, the desolation showing the more cruelly because the day's sunshine so made sport of it, up past Toinetta's cabin to the Porta Vecchia, from which the stony street, the Via della Porta, rose steeply, under the earthquake arches, between the tall houses.

It was eleven o'clock of the morning. The mule's hole under each house was empty, for the mule was out with his load. The caffè, marked by a laurel branch over its door, was empty, for the men were away at work. The street was empty, the windows and doorways bare of faces, for the children were at school and the women at work. The piazza into which the Via della Porta opened opposite the church, under Chichetta's windows, was empty too, except for St. Francis looking down upon it from his niche. Florida crossed the piazza in the bright sunshine, and turned the corner of the church, and passed along its south side into the Via delle Acque.

From the Via delle Acque, a steep path of steps led up along the wall of the castle garden, between the wall and the rough stone arches of the aqueduct, in which the water was brought down to the paese from the castle spring. The way led past the lavatoio, half way up to the castle gate. The water from the lavatoio ran down the path, on either side of it, in little soapy streams. Florida could hear, all the way, as she came up the path, the voices of the women over their splashing and pounding of the linen.

The women, kneeling at the big stone trough, or

standing to hang the linen on cords stretched along the sunny yellow wall, looked up to greet her.

"Bon giorno, Scignurina!"

Old Soeu' Teré sat by the path, huddled up in the Signorina's cloak. It was the first time Florida had seen her out since her illness, and she stopped to speak to her. The old woman muttered something she could not half hear, though the others seemed to understand.

"What is it?" she asked of them.

"Some nonsense, Signorina," said Chichetta; "do not heed her."

But Giulin Settinella came nearer, and said: "She says it is not tainted water."

"Why does she say that?"

"Who knows, Signorina? She has kept saying it all the morning."

"Soeu' Teré, why do you say that?" asked Florida.

The old woman said: "Who knows, Signorina?" and fell again to mumbling.

Florida went on up the path. She was glad when a turn of it took her out of sight of the women. The sound of their voices, breaking out again behind her, followed her almost to the castle.

The castle gate stood open. The path inside curved up from it through thickets of laurel, oleander and myrtle, by balustraded terraces and mossy old stone steps; along the stone water course overgrown with fern and maidenhair; past the grotto and the plaster nymph that lay as she had fallen many years ago, where the garden architect, a pupil of Alessi it was said, had placed her at the edge of the spring that gave water to the town; through an unclipped alley of myrtle, dark and damp; through a pergola, whose bare dry vines tapped and rattled; then through the stately way of cypresses that lay along the ridge

of the hill to the east of the castle; and from that round under the castle walls to its north side, and to the great entrance door there, arched, rusticated, and set on either side with wrought-iron torch brackets. The heavy iron-bound door stood open; and beyond, through the dusk of the vaulted passage there, Florida could see the bright sunshine that flooded the inner court.

When there had been nobody but old Gianin at the castle she had always gone through this passage, sure to find him in the court, working in the flower and vegetable beds, between the box borders, among his potted lemons and little fruit trees; but now she stopped to knock at the door that led from the right of the passage to the Guards Hall.

Gianin, the gobo, opened the door on the very instant of her knock, as if he had been expecting her, and waiting for her there in the huge cold stone room.

At sight of her his gargoyle face lighted up, distorted with a mixture of anxiety and relief.

"Oh Signorina, I have prayed that the Signorina might come," he cried. "Madame is in the West Gallery; the Signorina must go to her at once. I do not know what would have happened if the Signorina had not come. This way, I pray the Signorina."

"But madame may not want to see me."

"That must not matter. It cannot. Some one must see madame who knows what to do with her. I tell the Signorina that if the Signore does not come back, or if some one does not take care of madame, quickly, quickly, it will be too late."

"Madame is ill?"

"Signorina, one does not know what to call it. And there is no one. Only French animals of servants. Come quickly, I pray the Signorina."

"Go ask if madame permits."

"If but the Signorina would come. Madame would not even know that she was there. Madame sits all day and looks into the fire, and never knows that one is there till one has spoken to her many times. Oh, if thou wouldst but come quickly!" He dropped into the "tu" he had used with her when she was a child.

Florida followed him, not knowing what else to do, into the court, and across it, through the box borders, past the beautiful old well with its two stone pillars and wrought ironwork. The south door across the court stood open, and she could see, out and across the corridor, the sunshine again, upon the south terrace.

Gianin opened the door of a room on the right of the corridor — he did not knock — and they entered.

It was the room with the long windows opening to the west terrace and the cypress allée, that lay there, symmetrically, as on the east, along the ridge of the hill. Florida, from the doorway, could see across the room and out again and down between the two dark high walls of cypress to the far hills at the allée's end. She had a quick wonder that the room should not be more unfamiliar from its look now of being really lived in. Heretofore she had seen it only when Gianin would sometimes open the blinds a moment on the long unstirred dust, proudly showing her the walls and ceiling that Il Cappucino came all the way from Genoa to do in the very height of his day's baroque. The heavy old chairs and tables would be crowded into the corner by the huge stone hearth, and everywhere a desertion and desolation that seemed all the more pathetic because of somebody's long ago mistaken effort to make it beautiful. Now there were rugs and curtains everywhere,

cushions in the chairs, and lounges, and books and flowers that must have been brought from very far away.

A fire was blazing gorgeously on the hearth, and a lady wrapped in furs, though the room was warm, sat crouched over it. She did not look up at Gianin's opening the door and timid: "Madame, Signora mia, —"

He went nearer to her.

Florida drew back into the passage. She wanted to turn and run away. It was more tragic even than she had thought it would be, and she was afraid.

Gianin came back to her at the door, and said: "Go thou in."

The castle lady crouched there over the fire, shivering, and holding a cloak of dark fur wrapped close about her. Her hair, so black that it had blue lights in it, was wound round about her head in an odd, careless way. She did not turn her head at the sound of Gianin's voice, or of Florida's step toward her across the floor, and when Florida spoke to her she started at the unfamiliar voice, looking up bewildered.

It was after a full minute that she said: "You here? Why did you come?"

As she raised her head, the lines of her throat and chin and the oval of her face were brought into lovely white relief against the dark fur she held with one hand clutched about her shoulders. There was an odd scar, like a necklace, very white, about her throat. She looked up at Florida out of eyes that were like dark stains in the whiteness of her face, and yet, as Florida saw when she looked into them, were quite blue in the long, thick shadows of their lashes. She was not young, she looked very ill and very unhappy, but she was beautiful with the special beauty of fated things, of autumn and sunset and things

towards the end; with that intense and subtle and thrilling beauty which seems, somehow, specially to belong to things that are passing away.

She did not leave her chair, or hold out her hand to Florida. She only looked at her, and said: "Why did you come?"

"I had to come," said Florida, in English, standing very tall and strong and young before her. "Please, oh please, don't mind. I was so worried about you. I so wanted to see you."

"I told you not to come."

"I know; forgive me."

"You should n't have. I don't know who you are, or what you are doing in this place, but I know that you are of the people who should not have to do with me. I knew it that day when I saw you in the garden. I was sorry I had gone there."

She spoke too in English, but without seeming to notice that she did.

"I so wanted to come," said Florida. "I have no excuse but that, — that I so wanted to come."

"But why?" asked the lady. She lifted her head as if she were throwing off some weight of sleep, and her face grew hard, all the lines of it. "Why did you want 'so' to come?" The hardness was in her voice too. "Were you curious to see the woman they tell such tales of? Did you want 'so' to see what manner of thing it was that hid itself here, and how it lived, and how it suffered? Well! You see" — with a spreading out of slim white hands that trembled. "It is quite alone. It sits over the fire and shivers, in furs, and it snarls at you. Or do you know who I am, and all of that? And does it interest you to see for yourself how such things end? What have you been reading lately? Did you think in life it would be interesting, a new sensation for you? You

see it is n't. It is just a matter of growing old and ill and ugly and stupid and bad-tempered. Why don't you go away? Is your curiosity not yet satisfied?"

Then, because she saw in Florida's face that she had hurt her, she drew herself together in an effort to make up for it. She seemed to throw away the other mood, or to try to, and smiled. Florida had never seen a face so lighted by a smile. The peculiar sensitiveness there was about her mouth had been, before she smiled, piteously appealing, as a sensitiveness to pain, as showing how much she had been hurt, and would be hurt. But when she smiled, one saw that it was, too, a sensitiveness to every happy thing, every kind thing, that had come, or might come, to her; and it appealed so, even more piteously. Two deep, unexpected dimples came into her cheeks when she smiled, and lent a something childlike and happy to her face, and made it very sweet, and far the more sad.

"Oh, you poor child, I am being horrid to you. I know it was n't that, I do know, really. It was n't that you were curious, it was that you were kind. Thank you for meaning to be kind. Only you can't be, to me, and really, you had better go away."

"Are you angry with me?"

"No, no."

"Then don't send me away like this."

"I must," said the lady, with a hopeless gesture, a lifting and letting fall of one hand very wearily. "There are many reasons." The smile went out of her face, suddenly as it had come there, like a light, and she leaned back in her chair, drawing the furs yet closer around her, and looking away from Florida.

"But if you are not angry with me, may n't I stay a minute?" said Florida.

The lady did not seem to hear her, and she stood uncertainly, much troubled. To stay seemed so insistent, so intrusive. On the face of things, one could n't; and yet one could n't go.

As she stood there, she thought of Illsboro playing London Bridge, remembering him, big, boyish, fine and kind, but utterly different and far away. The woman who sat looking into the fire meanwhile seemed to have quite forgotten her, and as Florida saw her now she came to be, suddenly, as she sat there, oddly like the Monna Lia that Florida had made believe so long ago. The wave in the dark hair across her forehead seemed to have been worn there by some heavy weight, like a crown, as though shame and sorrow were a crown. Her eyes were haunted. It was as if all the wrong that she had done, all the wrong that had been done to her, through the years, haunted her eyes.

It seemed to Florida that a long time passed.

Then Gianin came into the room, carrying a little silver tray and two glasses of wine.

"Madame did not touch her breakfast," he said to Florida, "nor last night her dinner. Cannot the Signorina do something?"

Florida took one of the glasses and went to the lady. "Monna Lia," she said, "you are to drink this."

The lady turned a dull, heavy gaze upon her and did not answer.

"Madame sat here like this all night," said Gianin.

"Drink it," said Florida.

Then the lady laughed, and took the glass from her. "There is one for you too?" she said. "Yes? Ah, Gianin has such nice manners!" She looked up comically at Florida. "I have not nice manners, but since you are here, and the wine is here, and as I

cannot do otherwise, permit me to insist, Signorina, that you accept a glass." She raised her glass to Florida, and said: "Long life and happiness!" and drank and shivered and gave the glass back to Gianin. "That is all the hospitality I can offer you," she said.

"Oh, madame," cried the man, "I could prepare such a luncheon, such a risotto, if but madame would invite the Signorina. Perhaps if madame would invite the Signorina, then madame too would eat a little."

"Oh, Gianin," said the lady.

He backed out with the tray. The lady laughed at Florida. "How very awkward," she said. "Gianin's zeal puts me in a most ungracious position. I must leave you to extricate me, and yourself, Signorina. I am afraid I cannot think any more about it."

"I'll go," said Florida, "if you'll promise to eat the risotto."

"Come here," said the lady suddenly; "come quite close till I look at you."

Florida came to her, and bent down to meet the close scrutiny of her blue, dark-fringed eyes. The sunlight was bright in the room, and the firelight too was upon her face as she bent over the castle lady. The castle lady looked at her for a long minute, then she said: "Why, you're a child; you're a little, lost child. What are you doing here? Who ought to be taking care of you? Somebody must be missing you dreadfully."

"Nobody is missing me," said Florida; "that's why I came away, because nobody would miss me. Monna Lia, I'm going to sit down on the floor here by the fire, and drink my glass of wine, and stay a little. You see, there's nothing you can do about it."

XII

ONCE upon a time there was a little girl whose name was Mary. She was ten years old. She wore a black dress. There was much bunchy crape about the dress, because her governess luxuriated in woe. The crape was very dusty and crumpled because Mary had come a long journey. She stood on the threshold of a beautiful room. There were several people in it, and they all stopped talking and looked at her. She could not see them very plainly because her eyes were tired with crying. She had been crying because her mother was dead. She had been crying for a long time because her mother had been long ill and there had been no one to spare her knowledge. She had been with her mother when she died.

One of the women in the room said: "What a little object! Come here, Mary, and let's look at you."

The woman was Mary's aunt. She looked like the picture of Mary's father, that had always been on the little table by the bed. He had been dead so long that Mary did not remember.

"What a guy they've made of the child," said Mary's aunt. "I must get her something to wear to-morrow. Go find some of the servants to look after you, child."

On Mary's twelfth birthday the gardener at her aunt's place down in Surrey, where she and the cross old governess spent most of the time, gave her a puppy. Of course the puppy died at once. That was to be expected, because it was the only thing Mary had to love in the world. She wore a piece of the puppy's chain, like a necklace, for weeks after, round her throat, under her dress. It cut sharply and deep into her throat. The cross governess *could*

not get it away from her. It hurt her horribly. It was a brass chain, and made a horrid wound. In the end they had to get the doctor to get it away from her. The wound left a scar for always.

A year or so after, Mary was sent to a convent in Paris, the convent that is empty and desolate now in the rue de Varennes, but which then was a place where one could be very happy.

When Mary was sixteen, her aunt took her away from the convent. It was dreadful leaving the convent where she had been happy.

One night, in her aunt's London house, she was kneeling in her night-dress before her shabby little old trunk. The trunk was opened, and against the lid of it she had propped up an ebony and ivory crucifix. She had been back for a week at her aunt's, and she had not dared to take the crucifix out of the trunk for fear her aunt would laugh at it. She had lighted two candles, and balanced them with much difficulty on the things in the top of the trunk, one candle on either side of the crucifix. She had put a rose at its feet. She had some poor little idea, as she knelt there in her night-dress, of laying her whole life, an offering, at the feet of the crucifix, like the rose on top of the things in the trunk tray. She did not hear the door open, or know that any one was there, till she heard some one laughing at her. It was her aunt and a man. The man said, with a Frenchman's accent, looking at her out of long, narrow eyes: "Beautiful and a mystic, and innocent, and of a temperament, oh, but of a temperament! Dieu des Dieux, madame, it is a great discovery!"

A little while after, her aunt told her she was to marry the man. She was terribly afraid of him.

She never ceased to be afraid of him. She grew

more and more afraid of him, through all the ten years that were none the less dreadful because many envied her.

Once, for a little time, she was afraid of herself.

And then, for a time, she was afraid of nothing in the world, nothing, for there was Illsboro.

XIII

"GARDEN-HOUSE girl," said the castle lady to Florida, "why are we talking in English? Are you English?"

"No, American."

"You are n't alone here?"

"With Maria Domenica, who was my nurse, and who was always good to me. I was happy here with her when I was a child, and I knew, even then, that it would be here, if ever I, — I needed to, I should come back." She told of it, of the unhappiness, without meaning to tell.

"And you needed to? You poor little thing. Please, — may I ask, — your black dress? Do you mind my asking of that?"

"My baby is dead. I was not with him when he died. I was away with people who were having a good time."

"Oh, oh, — ! And there is no one to help you?"

"No."

"Oh, but there must be, you child. Your mother?"

"I'm better alone."

"Your husband?"

"I'm better alone."

"Forgive me for asking things."

"Oh, if only one could ever tell things! May I please put another log on the fire?"

The fire had almost burned out, Florida and the castle lady had been sitting before it so long. Most of the time they had not talked at all. It was always the castle lady who broke the silences. Florida sat on the floor, at her feet, before the fire.

It was all so strange that nothing of it seemed strange. It was as things come to be when one has gone beyond certain limits. Florida's years shut in by drawing-room walls; her thoughts all channeled toward the pleasing of Jack's people, toward the one end that he might be pleased with her; her emotions forced down under cover of the things his people seemed to consider the only things worth emotion, — one's dress, one's invitations, one's "success," — all had prepared her for just some such breaking down of barriers as this.

"But child, do you know who I am?" the castle lady would say. She would lift her head, and the firelight shone upon the lovely line of her throat and chin. It was in the depths of her eyes, and lighted her hair, touching the waves of it. She had let the fur cloak slip back a little, and Florida saw the white scar that was like a necklace around her throat. There was something specially tragic in her indifference to her beauty, her carelessness and hopelessness of it. The same abandon of all effort, all hope, was in her voice and in the way she said, so desperately that it was almost carelessly: "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," said Florida.

"How did you know?"

"Vanini told me."

"That queer man?"

"Yes."

"Why do you say it like that? Had you known of me before?"

"Yes," said Florida.

There was a silence that seemed fairly to throb with the things that were unsaid, that could not be said, as if the woman's thoughts, and the girl's, stirred the air and set its waves in motion, as voices do.

It seemed to Florida that she felt the other woman's thoughts with a sharp pain. She waited an instant, dumb with sympathy. And then she risked it, because of some feeling she had that it would comfort this woman to hear of the man who was such a schoolboy. She thought of him, big, fine Illsboro, singing as he tramped through the mist, and making them all play London Bridge. That boyishness in him would be so great a part of what one who loved him must love him for, and was so good, so simply, honestly, absurdly good, that it gave one a great thing to rely on. In the disorder of her mood, her thoughts, her emotions, her judgments of right and wrong, she wanted to comfort in any way she could this woman who loved Illsboro, to give her whatever she could of him to rely on in her need.

"He was almost the last person I saw before I came away," she said.

The castle lady did not move. "Illsboro?" she said, in a very quiet voice; but all the name meant to her was in her eyes, and she looked straight at Florida, not minding that she saw.

"Yes. It was at Haunt's Manor. I was stopping there. My sister married Bob Tredennis. Lord Illsboro came the day before I left."

"Oh, were they nice to him?" It was a queer question to ask, with her eyes searching Florida's. "Were they nice to him? Has, — all this, — hurt him beyond undoing? Have I hurt him so that he could n't go back to his place among them? If I

were — a long way off, — if I were dead, — could he go back to them, and begin again, as if, — this, — had n't been? Tell me, tell me."

She had to say: "Tell me, tell me," twice over, because Florida was trying not to cry out a hundred pitying things.

"Tell me, I have n't hurt him too much?" she said.

"They are very nice to him," said Florida.

"All of them?"

"All of them."

The castle lady drew a long breath, and gave her head an odd little lift, as though to raise it above fears and above her own unhappiness. "I am so glad," she said, "that people are nice to him. He needs people. Did you ever see any one who so needed people? He has been living with ghosts for ten years, and he's so alive and young and strong. Did he laugh his big laugh?"

"Yes, adorably."

The lady's face was lighted like a lamp. She leaned forward in her chair, her hands clasped before her, and went on asking things eagerly, as if she never could hear enough. "Tell me all the absurd little things," she cried. "How big his step was across the room, and yet how he never seemed too big, or clumsy, or to make a noise. Is n't it amusing how his hair curls like a baby's? And he is so ashamed of it. Did he make everybody laugh?" She was laughing herself, as if she were talking of some lovable, spoiled child, proud of its mischief. "He is such a tease, always making fun of things. And did he sing, — what he calls singing?"

Suddenly her laugh seemed to shadow her face instead of lighting it. The dimples in her cheeks seemed suddenly very pathetic.

"He was singing when I first saw him," said

Florida, trying to laugh too. She told about meeting him with Bob in the mist.

"It is good to hear," said the castle lady. "His letters, — you know just what they'd be; big men like that can't write letters. I love him the better because they are like that. Tell me more."

And then her eyes grew vague again, and she seemed to go far away, out of hearing, far from the garden-house girl, and from touch of this world, and quite alone. She had been so much alone, sitting there through hours and days by the fire, with only Illsboro's letters for company and hope and reason to live, that all other things fell away as she thought of them. They had been the only thing real in the world for her, — those long, painstaking, kind letters that she read uncounted times over, and yet that told her as plainly as if he had written it instead of things about the cub hunting at old Bob's and what was going on in the House, and its being so ripping to see everybody again, don't you know, — told as plainly as if it had been put into words, of the nearing, inevitable end. He would come back, and he would have missed her. He would be glad to see her, and sink back for a little time into the life he had lived for ten years, because of her, — the life of hiding from his own people, keeping always away from all the right birth gave him of duty and opportunity and comradeship, sink back into the life of emptiness and isolation for a while. He would try to spend his energy on tramps through the hills, and she would go with him as far as she could, but such a very little way, and every day less, pretending, when she could not go one step farther because of the pain that twisted and crushed her heart, and rose to her throat and choked her, and rose to her eyes and blinded her, that she did not care about walk-

ing and wanted to turn back; and he would go on alone, a little hurt, for she knew how he hated to be alone. And every day he would pour over papers four days old. He would read of things happening in the world she kept him away from, the great things and the little things, what great men were doing among great men, and who was stopping over Sunday at somebody's. He would lounge before the fire or in the shade of the terrace awning and say, "Now talk to me," as he lighted his pipe. And she would talk, wondering what on earth she talked about. — She saw it all. . . .

Always as she thought back over the ten years that had been so beautiful, she would see that through it all, even in the most beautiful times, she had known how it would be, that the end would come, and how it would come. He had never known. She had been beautiful for him, and brilliant, and — for ten years she had made him think it — had woven a thing out of life that satisfied him. He had never known that she tried desperately, and almost from the first, hopelessly. He had not seen that she was failing, that it was all failing from the first. And then the failing had come, so inevitably and commonplacely and absurdly. After ten years he had gone away for a little, saying he really did not care whether he went or not, just to run over to England and see how the old place looked, do you see, and how people were getting on, and what was happening to everything; — not realizing at all, what she so fully realized, that it was the beginning of the end.

Sometimes, too, as she sat there through the long hours, she thought back over the years before he had come into her life. For ten years she had not thought of that time, had drawn her love for him close about her to shut out all other things and make a barrier

between the time with him and all other times, past or to come. But now the other times seemed to be laid very bare to her, as if the barrier availed no longer. Sometimes, she seemed to be back again in her life with Gramondin and those years in which she had been acknowledged the most beautiful and most fêted woman in Paris, with "position" supposed to make up for anything, yet bearing an amount of misery, she had thought, that was the sum of all the misery that could be borne. In moments like this she would see Gramondin watching her. For ten years she had forgotten his face, seeing only Illsboro's. Now there were hours, whole days, when she could not remember Illsboro's face, but only Gramondin's. She would hear his step behind her chair. Once, thinking she heard it, she cried out in terror, — the same terror she had grown to have of him in the old days, and her maid had come, and there had been nothing to explain.

She had endless time thus to sit there, looking back and looking forward, seeing dreadful things with her eyes closed.

Sometimes the future she saw was not her own future, but Illsboro's, as she had made it for him, as she had ruined it. Sometimes she wished that he might never come back to her, that he might take up the life that lay wasting for him in his own land, among men who were free and women who had no need to hide. If he forgot her he could go back and take up things again where he had left them off. But sometimes she could not bear to think of that. She wanted only that he should come back to her, and give her the kindness that was left of love. Those were the worst times, when she wanted to keep him at the cost of all his life, just to have him near.

In those times she did not care what her love cost

Illsboro. She went back again to the time when there had been no stopping to think, when both he and she had been swept up in the great whirl of their love. It had always seemed to her to be just that, the great wind that was Destiny. There had been no standing up against the wind. The wind had come out of those infinite spaces beyond time, its rising had been behind the farthest stars. It was the wind that had swept the world from the beginning, that carried the souls of men and women with it through great spaces of light and dark. Once it had seemed to her that, on and on, through all eternity, the wind would carry the souls so caught up in it. Neither life nor death was of any matter; it was all a sweeping past in the wind. But now she knew that the wind just let one fall; and that, where it let one fall, there one must lie; and that one fell alone, and lay alone, and in darkness. Sometimes she had thought of the darkness as merciful, covering things. There was so much suffering to cover, — and such need that it should be covered, — that Illsboro should not know.

She had not let him know. If he had known that she suffered or that she feared, he would not have gone away. And he had so wanted to go to England. In all the tragedy of it the thing had been so simple, — he had just simply wanted to go back to streets where there was everybody to nod to, and wet autumn fields that soused under one's horse's hoofs, and to everybody afterwards at dinner. He had tried not to let her see how he had wanted to go back. And just in that trying not to let her see, she had felt so terribly, what he had not yet felt, but must, inevitably, come to feel, in some day drawing always nearer, that, if it were not for her, he could go back and live there, and begin all over again. The power of youth, that had always been his, made that possible. What

a power it was! What could he not have done? And all that power had been annulled by her for ten years. It was a strange thing, and a terrible, to have dulled the splendid roughnesses of youth and strength, to have leveled them to monotony, for ten years. She was so old and tired. It was only when one was old and tired that one understood things. And then it was too late. And then, too late, one always understood too well. . . .

"Tell me more of him," she said to the garden-house girl. She put her hand out and touched Florida's shoulder. "You're really there," she said, laughing a little; "and I can really touch you? Tell me about silly, everyday things. Did ever you see him at breakfast, when he'd been up and out for hours, and all outdoors and all the morning seemed to cling about him, and be in his eyes? Those enormous English breakfasts! I can see him eating porridge, and making everybody eat things. Quick, talk to me!"

Florida told her, quickly, anything she could think of.

"And his hands," said the lady; "did you notice how gently he uses his hands, although they're so big? They're the sort of hands that take care of things, and never hurt things. He takes one's hand in his big grasp, and there's nothing to fear in the world." Her voice broke. "Tell me more," she said, yet again, shutting her eyes.

Florida talked on. She told everything she could think of, as if she were talking to some one who might have been there through it all. She told who had been stopping in the house; she wished she could remember what the women had worn, and who had taken who in to dinner. She told how they'd played games, and how Illsboro had led them all. She told about

the green leather dress and the parrot wing, and Mrs. Temple-Vaulx, and mimicked Evelyn's darky talk, and the great poet saying, "dear duchess."

"You make it all seem near and real," said the castle lady. "You make one see it all as if one were there. I feel almost as if I were alive too, not a ghost that people pass and do not see, that may not go into the places of people who are alive and real." She flung one arm across her face as if to ward off something, and said, in a very pitiful, childish way: "Do you think that, if he is so happy there, when he comes back here he will be unhappy? Do you think that one could come back from real people to a ghost?"

And then Florida insisted that *that* life, that other life, could n't mean much to him; the pleasure in going back to that was just in going back for a little while, knowing he need not stay, and had this to come again to.

"Poor little thing," said the lady, breaking wearily in upon her eagerness; "why are you so kind to me, you poor little thing?" Yet with her eyes hidden, she would ask if Captain Marley were as good-looking as Illsboro, if any one were as good-looking as he, if any one were ever as un-self-conscious. "Women always love him," she said, "and he never knows it."

"He would n't care," said Florida; "one sees that. He's for outdoors and big things, men's things. Or else just a boy's jolly things on a holiday. There were several very lovely people there, and the only one he bothered at all about was a little schoolgirl who played games."

She told about Alicia's shy little pansy face and round eyes, that were always turning in appeal to the glittering eyes of Mrs. Temple-Vaulx. She found herself, in spite of herself, talking about Jack, telling

how good-looking he too was, in a way very different from Illsboro's; and then she stopped, for it hurt to talk about him, and talked on again about Illsboro, and how they had played London Bridge, and had caught Alicia "passing through."

The castle lady listened as if every word mattered.

"Tell me more," she kept saying; and then suddenly: "Oh, but I must not let you stay here with me; you must n't be with me. What would they say? It is all so wrong."

"Monna Lia, don't think of such things. Oh, what does anything matter? Or else it all matters so much that there's no use in thinking, and nothing makes any difference."

"But it does, it does. Oh, child, you don't know. I harm things, all things, and most of all, the things I love most."

"Don't talk like that. It can only hurt you to talk like that."

"That does n't matter; it's only a hurt more or less. Everything hurts, everything I remember and everything I look forward to. I have nowhere to rest my thoughts. Everywhere I turn my thoughts there is pain. I want you to know that. When you know all the wrong there is to know of me, think of the pain too. Oh, how queerly I'm talking. It's that I have n't talked to any one in so long." She looked up at the girl, and all the things that were between them gathered, forbidding and appealing, in her eyes. "You must understand," she said.

"Don't let 's care," said the girl.

"We are so far away from them all," said the castle lady. "What are you doing so far away from them all?"

"I could n't bear things," said Florida.

"But you'll go back, and then —"

"I shan't go back."

"And then they 'll blame you — ' Jack ' will blame you — for this. And you 'll wish I had n't let you." She broke off suddenly, and added in a voice Florida did not understand at the time: "But then you 'll know. And then you can tell him why I let you."

XIV

It was indeed as Vanini had said, once having taken up there was no putting down of the things Florida was to do in the paese.

"Oh, how much I've got to thank you for," Florida said to him, many times over, as they did together the countless little great things there were to be done for the poor people, in the havoc wrought by the dreadful rains that ended November, and brought half December in, and in the yet more dreadful cold, that by New Year had made the paese suffer as it had not suffered within anybody's memory. She thanked him for teaching her how to get so tired in the day that she could sleep at the end of it, and how to do so much that she had not time to think, and how to care so much for other people that she could not stop to care for herself.

She said of him to the castle lady, laughing about him, and yet with an admiration that was very real: "I've such heaps to thank him for. It seems as if I had all life to thank him for. It sounds absurd. I can't describe it. Don't laugh. He makes one feel that life is a wonderful, real, near thing. One touches it all. I can't word what I mean. When I was a little girl I used to love to lie with my face on the grass, in the leaves and the moss, and feel the life of them at my lips. And it's like that when one gets

down close to people's lives, touching their lives, as one might touch the grass and the leaves. Vanini gives it one, all, like that, to touch. Oh, I don't care if you do laugh, Monna Lia. He knocks at my door, and does n't wait, and comes in, as if it were quite to be expected, and says: 'Signorina, this one wants you, and that one wants you, this one has no food, and that one has no fire, and there's an old woman dying, and a baby being born, and give your money and give your time, and it's no more than you ought to do, and, bother you, be quick about it.' "

All the money she had to give, she gave, but the trouble lay deeper than could be reached by money. The castle lady gave her much money to spend as she thought best, though Florida and Vanini dared not tell the paese people from where it came. The feeling was always so strong against the castle lady that every evil befalling the town forever after would have been attributed to the acceptance of the money. But, much as it was, and far as Vanini made it go, the money got nowhere near the bottom of the trouble. Florida was face to face for the first time with the dreadful fact that mere giving does not really help.

"What could help?" she cried to Vanini.

"Only to go on, Signorina, and do the next thing."

Perhaps the next thing would be to do the day's work in the garden house, because, for some especial reason, Maria Domenica could be of more use, just then, than she, somewhere in the paese. Sometimes, for a while, she feared, what Vanini had at first feared for her, that it was only the picturesqueness of it all that appealed to her imagination; that the mood of it would pass. There were minutes when she felt herself insincere, had a quick sense of herself as some one in a story, who did these things as a part of it.

There was one time like that in the church. She

had gone in to sit there for a minute, at noon. She had been way up in the hills that morning, with the doctor, to a sick old woman, who was afraid to see him without her. It was a day of scirocco, when the distances were thick and heavy, and everything seemed to be colored like the desert by its dry, stale wind. Florida had stayed long with the old woman, after the doctor had gone, doing whatever she could for her, and then had come down through the dry, rattling olives. In the oppressive wind the whole world seemed an unaired room, so close and stale it was. Every ugly thing seemed uglier. The dust was strewn on the dry terraces that the rains had devastated. It seemed as if every dog in the paese were barking. All the smells of the paese whirled about the piazza in the dust. Florida sought refuge from the wind and the dust in the church for a few minutes, as she came down through the paese.

She had thought to find the church empty, but there was the reverendo padre teaching a class. All the little girls of the paese were packed into the benches near the church door, and the reverendo, with his book and wand, walked up and down the aisle, patiently dropping the dottrina, drop by drop, into such little reservoirs of minds as there were under the tangled curls.

"Mio Dio, vi adoro, qui presente," — this in his blurred, ill-accented Italian; then in the dialect: "Now, all together, say it. Angelica Postilione, keep your feet still; stop shuffling, do you hear me? Mio Dio—" and the little voices took it up in a sing-song, the padre beating time with his rod. "Enough! Lisabetta, stand up alone and say it. What, you can't say it? Shame on you! Go kneel there on the floor, where they can all see you. You, Cecca, stand up; take your thumbs out of your

mouth, and say it. Mio Dio, vi adoro, qui presente — There, that's it."

Florida slipped into a chair a little from them, and looked on, interested. It was so quaint to see Cecca Moti, aged five, a slice of bread clutched behind her in two very dirty little hands, standing up to tell them how she adored her God, here present.

Here present, — the words gave her, Florida, a sudden thrill of meaning as she sat in the old church that restoration had made tawdry.

It was very cold in the church, and half dark, in the dark day. Only a light burned at the altar of the sacrament. The gilt and tinsel votive offerings hung about the altar caught the light and shone out of the dimness as if they had been made really of gold.

"Go on, Cecca, — vi riconosco, — thumbs, I tell you, — vi riconosco, — oh, truly, you don't know it! Why don't you know it? I'll tell you why, — because you are bad. You were playing blind cat when you should have studied. Shame to you! Go kneel by Lisabetta, — vi riconosco, come mio creatore e mio sovrano Signore. Now all together, — what have you got in your hands, Cecca? Your dinner? Get up and bring it to me. Bread, truly! What are you doing with it in church? You were so hungry? Well, you shall stay hungry until you know your lesson. Who does not work, does not eat. Gabriella, to you, — vi riconosco, — Cecca, don't you dare to cry; if you listen well, and can say it at the end of the class, you shall come home with me and have of my onion soup to eat with your bread. Go on, Gabriella, from the beginning, and any one who interrupts I will give to the witches. Mio Dio, vi adoro, qui presente, vi riconosco, come mio creatore e mio sovrano Signore, — over again, — now again. Now, Cecca, stand up

there, and we'll see if you have paid attention, — thumbs, mind, — *Mio Dio, vi adoro, qui presente.*"

Florida had fallen on her knees, and now she covered her face with her hands. In the poor little old church with its tawdry restoration, its baroque gilding and turkey-red hangings and dusty artificial flowers, it was wonderful to feel the meaning of those words, "*Qui presente,*" the plain, commonplace everydayness of it, the mixing of it with Cecca's bread and the padre's onion soup, Angelica Postilione's little feet, that would shuffle on the stones, Cecca's thumbs, that would not keep out of her mouth.

But even as she knelt there, there came to her the sense of her own insincerity. It was "*atmosphere,*" and it thrilled her because it was such. To the reverendo and the babies it was as real as bread and onion soup. But to her it was literature, and she thrilled, shivered, with appreciation of it. And if there were a God, she thought, how he must have understood, and had contempt for her.

Once, when Vanini happened to come into a very wretched cabin where she was sitting by the fire rocking to sleep a sick woman's sick little baby, she saw a sudden light of worship in his eyes, and, as he would have spoken, she stopped him almost with a cry: "Oh, don't say beautiful things to me! Don't make me think things! You can't understand, but I am so afraid I am doing it because it is *dans le paysage* —"

He did not in the least understand her. After awhile she stopped thinking, and just did things, without analyzing. Everything she did, she did with Vanini. Their comradeship was absolute, and their solitude. No matter how many people were about them, they were alone, he and she, in a world quite detached. And he was her world. It was only when

she was with the castle lady that she got away from him.

"I wish you knew Vanini better," she said often to the castle lady.

She could not understand Vanini's unwillingness to come to the castle. He often went up as far as the gate to meet her, but he never would come in. They would walk together down to the garden house, perhaps by the long way round, following the olive terraces, perhaps past the lavatoio and down through the paese.

Florida never knew which way she loved best. The strange spell of the olive weeds grew stronger and stronger upon her. The stately, classic woods, the foliage gray as the mists of time, the splendid, rude old gnarled black trunks and branches, curiously human in the storm and stress of their gesture, were full of poetry and mystery for her. "The trees went out to choose their king and they said to the olive, Reign thou over us." And the olive ruled over a sad country. Through all that season black and gray storm colors filled it. The great trunks and branches were stained very black with the wet, the gray of the leaf was the color of all the distances, the sky hung low upon the hills, sagged and trailed down into the valleys. Everywhere through the hills was the sound of running water, from springs that had broken loose and torrents that had gone quite mad. Nothing flowered on the terraces but the tiny pink-and-white daisies. The clayey mud of the hills stuck to one's boots in cakes.

Florida would drop down on the stones. "Scrape the mud off my boots, Vanini," she would say, and he would kneel to do it, and, very likely, while he knelt, without the slightest sense of being ridiculous, he would go on reciting the Odes of Horace, or Heaven

knows what, and preaching his doctrine. It was the doctrine of philosophers and saints, of the happiness of having nothing, of being always a pilgrim and a stranger, without staff or scrip or thought of the morrow, to possess nothing but the whole world and love for all mankind, to stand unbound, unburdened.

"It is only when there is nothing to take heed of in yesterday or in to-morrow," he would say, "that to-day is really one's own."

Sometimes she listened eagerly, her face glowing, and sometimes she laughed at him. He was so unlike anything she had ever known. When she thought of Jack, she laughed at Vanini. Those were her unhappy moments. One day, coming down through the olives, she would not walk with him, but must run and dance, her hair in her eyes, her feet scarcely touching the moss. He did not know that it was because she was unhappy that she laughed so. She was infinitely far away from him, of a sudden, race and class between them. He felt she was a thing that might, in a moment, vanish from him, lost in the mist that was gathering under the trees. Suddenly he felt that she was a thing without soul, and he hated her. He had not known that he loved her so.

It was through hate that he came to know the fullness of his love for her. He had thought that he wanted nothing of her, except the right, for the moment, to save her from whatever he could of trouble, and give her whatever he could of interest, of pleasure. But he was of the South, for all that the truly Northern spirit of renunciation was strong in him, and he knew it, in the moment when he knew he was incapable of love with hate. He hated her when she stood on tiptoe laughing at him under the olives. She clasped her hands behind her head, and danced, bending and swaying, a tall, slight thing like a reed

by the path. For a horrible minute she was not the Signorina he loved as her proud servant, her humble teacher; she was a soulless thing that came close and darted away, drew him and evaded him, gave pain, and did not know it, had no mercy. It took all his self-control to keep still, as he stood there, looking at her. And afterwards, for a long time, he would not go by that path again. When he went to meet her at the castle gate, they must go down through the paese.

That contented Florida perfectly. Vanini worshiped her when she stopped to talk to the women at the lavatoio, and to pet the piazza babies and the old people in the doorways, and to speak with the men, whose greeting was friendly as she passed. It was only her soul that he loved then, — and of that, her soul's fullness of faith and sympathy and even love, she gave him all he wanted, more than he would ever, it seemed to him, have dared to ask for. This little sister of the poor who worked with him, gave him the best thing in the world, and he forgot the need of renunciation, and the hate that was part of that other love. The bad moment was to come to him only once again, and that only long after. There were long hours of companionship, and there were moments when, in the freedom she felt from all convention, from all laws and traditions and customs, it might have gone hard with him, but for the something of the saints that was in him, ascetic, idealistic, some spirit of worship that gave itself without asking, almost without wishing, anything in return.

One night late, going down together in the dark to the garden house, from the room where Rina Moti's unwanted little baby wailed at the world, the Signorina put her hand into his hand as they walked, and it seemed to him so sacred a trust that when he bade

her good-night, he did not even lift it to kiss it, as he had often done before.

She talked to him much about the castle lady. She often thought of that last evening at Haunt's Manor, when she had felt herself so utterly a stranger among her own people, so utterly apart though in the midst of them, more infinitely alone because they were so near. She remembered the fancy she had had of not belonging to their world at all, but to the world outside their walls and their closed doors. She remembered how, while Illsboro laughed, she had been thinking of the woman "one could n't know." Her own distance from the world of Alicias had made that other woman seem curiously near. It had all come oddly true.

And Vanini, of this outside world, was much to her that she did not define or even realize. She loved his devotion to her. It was a thing she was always conscious of, there, about her, to be turned to and relied on. If she had not loved Jack as she did, she would not have so loved this devotion Vanini gave her.

In an odd way it was because she loved Jack that she loved Vanini. She was so tired of loving, she turned from that, with infinite relief, to being loved. And this man's love was so distant, so idealized a devotion, so absolutely a thing of mind and spirit, a thing so laid at her feet without any wish that she should touch it, so an offering she had but to leave alone, that she at first was not conscious at all of it, and then was conscious of it only as some atmosphere, like that of Italy and the hills and the town's life and the quiet of the garden, some ambiente, artistic and poetic, almost religious, encircling her.

He only asked to be with her when it was possible, as content when they were among people as at the rare times when they were alone. When they worked

together among the poor people, he, in his element, sure of himself and proud, commanded, and she obeyed; he led and she followed. He was her master, to whom she looked up, even adoringly. In his world she came second to him, content that it was so, honored most by his most careless treatment of her.

In the wilderness of the hills, in their long tramps together, they were equals, both belonging to the wilderness, meeting equally in the wilderness that belonged to them both. If she pictured him in the world she had come from, dressed like Captain Marley, taking Mrs. Temple-Vaulx in to dinner, she laughed and did not care.

When he was with her in her own little sitting-room, perhaps he scarcely talked, or would sit contentedly staring into the fire or out of the window; happy, she knew, just to be in the same room with her; and then she was conscious of his presence, as a comfortable restful thing to rely on and be glad of. Or perhaps he would, forgetful of her, lose himself in her books, passing far beyond her in his knowledge of them; become, in his absorption, another creature, her master here, when he thought to speak to her, to pour out in sudden floods his knowledge and understanding of things that were far beyond her, even as he was her master in the cabins.

The books that had been her father's filled all the walls above the wainscoting. They were as characteristic of her as they had been of her father. They showed an errant learning, a culture that was spread wide, but untrained, unchanneled. They showed the spirit of one who was restless and doomed to seeking. They were not rare or valuable, rather shabby, intimate and friendly; they rubbed shoulders comfortably with one another, and with Florida and with Vanini, as they had with the man who was gone.

The first time Vanini, often as he had been there, took any notice of the books, was one wild stormy morning when he came to the door of Florida's room unannounced and unexplained, at an impossibly early hour.

She was breakfasting by the sitting-room fire, and he looked past her from the door to the books, and suddenly strode toward them. "Oh, books, books! What friends you have, Signorina! I did not know. How dared I think I could be your friend, you who know these!"

He felt along the shelves, touching the volumes as a blind man might, with pleasure in his very touch upon them. "The great people who have thought and worded, and felt and understood, and made plain, how they can give to one, and how one can take of them!" He moved along the shelves as he talked, always brushing the books with his fingertips. "We fight through every day, in solitude and silence, and they have fought a greater fight, and speak to us out of it, to give us sympathy and courage."

"I know," said Florida, eagerly; "there's a thing I've been reading, 'Nourissons-nous de leur vaillance!'"

"We, who can't give," said Vanini; "we who can't give,— But, Signorina, here's your Homer and your Virgil in translation, and Goethe and Kant and Ibsen. Do you then read only French and Italian and English?"

"My humble apologies," said the Signorina, "but that is all."

"What a shame!" he turned in disgust from them; "you who have leisure," he said, "and can buy a book without going hungry."

Florida opened the door to the passage and called; "Maria Domenica, here is Vanini in an evil temper; bring him coffee quickly!"

"Signorina, I don't want coffee," he retorted.

"You must have it, or you will eat my books," said Florida. "You looked hungry enough when you came in; you are starving now. When did you last devour a book, Vanini?"

"Ah, the best book of all." He drew a little ragged book out of his pocket, and his face glowed.

Florida took the book from him, and saw to her surprise it was a copy of the four Gospels in English.

"It's so fine in your English," he said; "ah, there's a style, Signorina, and what a Man!" He took it jealously back from her hands.

Maria Domenica brought coffee, but Vanini had gone several heavens higher than any thought of coffee. He would n't sit down at the table; he held the cup that Florida put in his hands and wandered around among the bookshelves, only sipping the coffee when the Signorina or Maria Domenica commanded.

"He's quite mad," said Maria Domenica; "didst thou ever see a creature so starved, Signorina? And he will not eat."

To the castle lady Florida talked much of this Vanini, and indeed of everything. In her odd little, lonely, dreamy life she had never imagined a friendship as close and sweet as was grown, so quickly, to be this friendship of hers with the castle lady. She tried to keep things all commonplace, to talk as if it were the most natural thing in the world that she and this woman should be here together; and as time went on it seemed to her more and more natural that it should be so. She could not help thinking of this friendship as a lasting thing. She had grown, in the strange hours and days of this friendship, to care too much for the castle lady ever to let her for any reason go out of her life. In her detached mood the status of the lady meant nothing to her. The cynicism of

her world had helped her to see its women as not very different from the castle lady. Evelyn going just as far as she dared, but never too far, because she was too clever and had too much to lose, or did not care enough; little Alicia, paying in kisses for attentions she wanted only to make other women notice, or to show her mother she was not a "frump"; Evelyn breaking Bob's heart quite safely and respectably, Alicia breaking the heart of any one to whom it might have mattered, but only getting the credit of being a success — all the women she knew were like that, except the "frumps," and they were not, only because they could n't be. She wondered what she herself would have been if she had not loved Jack too much. She saw no difference, except of chance, between any of them or herself and the castle lady. She remembered things she had heard of the Marquis de Gramondin, terrible things that every one had known. And what must not have been the things that nobody had known? She thought of Mrs. Temple-Vaulx smiling upon Lord Illsboro.

Again, as when she had been a child, she was telling herself stories. In her moments, at first, of self-doubt, it came to her that perhaps this too was literature, that the castle lady was a Monna Lia as much as the "make believe" women of the world's great stories, the women whose faces she had known in pictures, whom she had made, in a life of her own, intimately her friends. In the castle that she, a child, had filled with story, now there was a real story being told out. She had minutes of fear that she should take it as a story, appreciating it, and her own part in it, as "copy" only. But soon she stopped the torment of such thinking and took the thing as it was, without analysis, and came to live in it, in the story, so intensely that there was no more sense of

looking on. After the long days, falling asleep in her own old room, she seemed back in the nights of her childhood there. Maria Domenica used to tuck her up every night in the little white bed, but it had been Mary from the painted wall above it, or some saint out of the old brown book, who came to pet her, or her own Monna Lia, just to sit on the edge of the bed and listen to her telling of little troubles; Undine perhaps, or Marie Antoinette, or Mary Stuart; Helen of Troy, or Francesca of Rimini, the storied women of the world, who meant to her fancy what neither the slave nurse nor the pretty mother had ever meant. Her friends had been all of the world's beautiful tragic women, not such of the paese children as were allowed to play with her occasionally in the gray house garden, nor yet the little girls she and Evelyn were thrown with in the far lonelier times at home. She had never put away the childish, — or else most unchildish, — things of make believe, for nothing had ever been given her in her life to take the place of them. Her life had been so empty, because of the lack of one thing, that she had had to fill it up out of her fancy. The little girl who had wept for days when she had been made to realize, learning her lessons, that her friend Jeanne d'Arc was dead, and who had stood up, pinafores and pigtailed, in full spirit of knighthood, to defend, when they said horrid things of Guinevere, had grown up to dream for herself a land and a king of dreams, and when it did not come true, and she felt herself old and wise, even yet she was not old enough or wise enough to turn, in her need, to anything but another illusion. As she had fallen asleep in the old nights, comforting herself with the presence of Monna Lia, so now she fell asleep with the thought that there was the castle lady to whom she really could go to-mor-

row. Her life, always curiously detached, curiously apart from the lives of the people about her, from the people, her mother, and Evelyn, and Jack most of all, curiously detached too from her place and circumstances as if she were not really born to it, did not feel the touch of it, had prepared her for the giving of just such a love as she gave to the castle lady. And, as the days went, she came to give this love, fearlessly, without analysis, as she gave now her love to the poor people and to Vanini. No one had ever come as had this woman, from the first moment, within so quick, so close, so sure a touch of her curiously untried friendship. All the accumulated loneliness of her twenty-five years found expression in her love for the castle lady. All the sympathy and tenderness and confidence stored up in her heart, that was a child's heart yet in a way, and very lonely, that she had always been wanting to spend with no one on whom to spend it, she was spending now upon the castle lady.

"You poor little thing," the lady would say; "but you must n't, you must not care about me so."

Once she said, when after a long day at the castle Florida had gone halfway home and had come back again, dreading the night for her, afraid to leave her alone to it: "It's dreadful that you should care about me so, — dreadful."

Florida had dropped down on the floor again in her place, curled up in a heap at the lady's feet.

"Why do you say that to me?" she asked.

"Have you no one to take better care of you than to let you love me?" the lady asked.

"You promised you would not talk about that, Madonna."

"But leaving aside all else, it's such a waste. Can't you see what a waste it is? I have nothing to give

you in return for it, nothing. I have given all I had to give, and there is nothing left." She held out her hands to Florida as if to show how empty they were. "You give me so much, and I give you nothing, nothing at all."

Florida understood so well, — it was not even the question of the half loaves.

"I can't care about you as you ought to be cared about, I can't," went on the lady. "I *cannot* care about anything, any more. I can't even appreciate your caring so for me. Once, *how* I'd have loved it. Now, it does n't make much difference. Nothing makes much difference. I can't even be grateful. It seems cruel to say that, but I must say it. I have nothing left to give to any one, Flori, it has all been given."

"Don't think about it, Monna Lia. I'm happy to be just with you. Leave it so."

She knew the castle lady wanted her.

"That's what I am so ashamed of," the lady would say. "I want you awfully. But it is not you, it is just *some one*. To have *some one* near, who makes me feel alive and real, who makes the thing seem less a nightmare, less a fever. It helps me so much, and it is so unfair to you."

But for that Florida did not care.

It came about that she went nearly every day to the castle, and there were times when it all seemed to be a matter of course, natural and commonplace.

She would scold the lady because she had n't eaten any breakfast, or would forbid her going out without a wrap, or order her in again because she turned so white with the effort to breathe in the wind, or would tuck her up on the sofa and amuse her with nonsense, coaxing the smile that was such a sudden light in her face. They would fall into long silences, — but that

was at the beginning of it only, before Florida realized the lady's need of just avoiding silence. After that she talked, always, chattering of anything that occurred to her, bringing all the doings of her days into it, making much of the least things.

The lady rarely talked. She had been silent so long. Sometimes she would have given anything, it seemed to her, anything in the world, to have been able to talk to the girl of herself, to tell of memories, dreadful memories, and beautiful memories that were come to be the greater sorrow. But she could not. Sometimes her eyes said the things. And always Florida understood with a perfect passion of understanding.

Once, chattering on about what she and Vanini were doing in the paese, she stopped suddenly, and cried out: "Oh, you know, *you know*, that it is n't because I think of myself that I talk so much about myself, but because I think about you!"

The castle lady only turned her head away with a slight lifting of it, and her hands moved away from Florida's hands. So Florida, helpless, went on talking about herself, telling long stories of the "make believe," sometimes speaking of Jack, sometimes of her baby, of little things she had thought she never could bear to speak of.

She had no idea of how much she told of her own story in the things she said, flinging out in half sentences her hatred of the world that had made her unhappy in its own irreproachable, effectual way. It would have surprised her to know how much the castle lady gathered of her story. Sometimes in answering her as she talked, the castle lady, perhaps by an expression of understanding, a word of experience, would throw, as it were, the light for an instant upon some place in her own life, and then would come in

an instant to her face a certain look the girl had learned to know well, that was like the drawing of a veil across it. She, Florida, would go on then, quickly, to speak of other things. There were sometimes, rarely, intense half minutes when the lady, not thinking, said things that gave her glimpses — then always the veiling again.

One gorgeous sunset, when they stood on the terrace watching the sky's triumph, the castle lady cried out with sudden terror: "Oh, there will be the wind again to-night, I cannot bear the wind."

And when Florida, understanding so much more than the words, threw both arms around her, she said:

"Why do you do that? You poor little thing, how sad your life must be, that you need care so much about me."

XV

LETTERS from the outside world read strangely enough in the garden house. The diligence brought the post every evening to Colla Bassa, and of a morning somebody was more or less sure to come rambling up the hill path through the wind or the rain with it to Coll' Alta.

Jack's rare letters, read by the olive-wood fire or down on the carved bench by the well, seemed things quite unbelievable. It could n't be believed that any one should so little understand. He wanted her to write to the Martins, as if she'd just happened to, and send lots of messages to Kitty, and, quite casually, of course, make it plain that she was fond as possible of the poor little girl. People were talking a lot of nonsense about her, Florida's, being jealous;

they said that was why she had n't come home. Of course she, Florida again, — she made that out of his confusion, — knew he 'd been bored to distraction with the poor child, just as he 'd been with the little Temple-Vaulx. They were all the same. Alicia Temple-Vaulx was better than the rest, it was her mother's fault. There was a good deal of talk about the poor little girl and Gerrard Illsboro. A shame it was. Before he 'd left England every one was saying things. He, Jack, was frightfully sorry for the poor little girl. Horse show was going on, and a few people were back in town, and there was a good deal to do already. He 'd been in town only a day or two, had been stopping with the so and so's, and the so and so's, and was off to the somebody's somewhere for Sunday. She must please write to the Martins as soon as she got this, and fix it up somehow, for it was, really, rather a mess.

As she was reading just that letter came Maria Domenica to the door:

"My little one, here's the doctor, he would speak with thee. It is about Filippo. It is that the malady of his eyes is worse even than they had thought. He will go quite blind, and that soon. He must be told, and the doctor says if only thou wouldst be the one to tell him, thou couldst help him hear it as could no one else."

She had many letters too from the little pretty Alicia. She wished she had never given Alicia her address, the letters seemed such an intrusion. She could see Alicia writing them, in this smart country-house or that, at the time when it is tactful towards one's hostess to have crowds of things to do. She saw the rooms wherein Alicia wrote her letters, — all the mirrors, all the soft silky things, and the silver things; felt the luxe, like an atmosphere foreign and

alien to the garden house, brought there against her will. Alicia wrote very sweetly though; one could n't help being fond of such letters. They told so much that Alicia never could herself, face to face, have told. They told of not only this and that happening, but of a great loneliness, a great need. She wanted Florida, missed her frightfully; wished she were with her, there in that queer place, where she was; wished she were anywhere away from *this*. *This* was so different from what one felt, — she knew so well what Florida had meant when she'd said that, that night, about having to get right away, quite out of it. If only one could. If only one — poor little Alicia — could just chuck it all, and go away to Florida, there where there was nobody. One night Alicia wrote, the letter dated at three of the morning, writing in bed because she could n't sleep. She'd been talking in the alcove on the stairs — Florida knew the Hollington's stairs; a lot of people were there for Laura's eighteenth birthday — after dinner to somebody, telling him how she hated it all, and wanted to get away from it, as Florida had. It was to Lord Illsboro she'd been talking. He was such a duck, and he understood everything, and the way his hair curled, and such blue eyes — was n't it funny how when one liked a person it was for such little things as that, — their blue eyes or the way their hair curled? And yet that did n't make it small. It was awfully big — oh was n't it — to love anybody. Only it was so unhappy.

And Bob wrote in mid December. That was an enormous compliment. Writing was not a thing he did often, or to everybody. He too missed her; wished there was some chance of seeing her when they went abroad after New Year; had thought there would be; had thought they would go to Cannes. But they were going to Egypt. So was Marley;

ordered out there. Hated Egypt. Evelyn used to, but now she wanted the climate. Of course she looked ripping in that kind of thing always. Beastly cold in England, rotten frosts, stopped hunting. That bay Florida used to ride bolted the other day with the little Temple-Vaulx; she rode him on the curb, she was just that sort. Illsboro stopped him; he was on Spider, it was easy enough. Temple-Vaulx mère made an awful fuss; hero saved daughter's life and all that. Wanted horse shot. Cheek. Evelyn had some white furry things and looked ripping. He was sending Florida some like them. Evelyn had a headache. Hoped Florida was all right, she must n't go and die or anything.

And one day, most unexpectedly, there was a letter from the duchess — she must have troubled to get the address from Bob. My dear, queer little creature, it read, do you know I often think of you? I hate to think of anything, and I am sorry you intrude yourself upon me so; I would not let you if I could help it. As I cannot help it, I write to you. Before you went away there was something I wanted to say to you. But my dear, I simply could not say it. When one has spent nearly sixty years teaching oneself never to say anything that one feels, one finds it impossible to use words except "*pour cacher la pensée.*" Did you know that all the words I used, in whatever little of talk we had together, I was using just to hide the thought that some trouble of yours — I don't pretend to know what — was crying out of your eyes to somebody, just anybody, old in the world and acclimated, whose experience might be of use to you, somehow or other, and the thought that I could perhaps be that *somebody*, of use to you, by reason of a need as great as yours that I myself used to know? For neither had I enough, and I too

went en grève. And it was of no use. I came back to the half loaf. But first I had pretty well starved myself and other people, and it was bad, child. And under all my words, when we talked together, was hidden the thought, — oh child, don't *you* do that. Sometimes it is easier to write than to say things, and I write to you now, after all this preamble, what, when we were looking at each other across the awful distance there always is between people, I could n't say; — just that I want to be your friend, if ever you need one of my sort, and I beg you, if ever the time comes when you need it, to ask of me the friendship I should be so glad to give, and that I *do* give you, and always shall, whether or not you want it.

That letter came on a day when, to Florida, need of such a friend seemed far off indeed. All *that* world seemed so far off. In *this* world it had been snowing, all the hills were white. The garden under the windows was deep in snow. Never had there been so silent a world. The olive boles were very black against the whiteness of the snow, and their branches were weighed down with it. The roofs of the *paese* were white with it, and the roofs of the castle, and its battlements and its towers. The window panes, through which Florida, come down to breakfast that morning, looked out upon the world, were frosted heavily; she had breathed upon the pane to make a space to see through. Her rooms were full of firelight, and her breakfast stood waiting on the little table in the book-room. The sun was out upon the white world. She would have a fine tramp up through the snow and the sunshine to the *paese*. She must stop in at one or two of the houses there, for this reason or that. Vanini would be waiting for her at Rina Moti's. He would walk up with her to the castle. And there

would be the castle lady, her Monna Lia, watching for her coming. Of what others and of what else than this life had she need?

Shortly before New Year there was a letter from Alicia to say that she and her mother would be in Cannes next week, — how well Florida could see it; the Croisette, the rue d'Antibes, — and would not Florida come over and stop with them? How she, Alicia, did wish she could go with the letter to Coll' Alta, and just stay there with her dear Flori forever and ever.

XVI

MONNA LIA came across the west room to meet Florida in the stormy morning light of the day before New Year.

She seemed an utterly different person. Her step was quick, her eyes were glowing, there was color in her cheeks. She held out her hands to Florida, for the first time, in eager welcome. She had never been just absolutely glad like that to see her before. And she had never before been beautiful in that vivid, alive, glowing way. Her hands, as they caught Florida's hands, were warm as if she felt nothing of the day's cold.

"Oh, Flori, I have a letter from Gerrard. He is leaving London to-day, this morning, he has left by now. He will come straight through, and be here to-morrow. He will surely, surely be here to-morrow."

"How beautiful you are!" said Florida, drawing away a little, still holding both her hands and looking at her.

The lady laughed, and blushed, and then dragged her hands away from Florida's, and covered her face with them.

"Yes, think I'm beautiful," she said, standing so, with her face hidden; "think that I'm beautiful, and make me think it, and make me forget things. Oh, I must — I must — break away from the things there are to forget, or I'll make him feel them. And if he feels them —" She gave her head its odd little lift as she stood there with her hands over her eyes. "He is so young and well and so strong. He is so beautiful and he so loves beauty. Everything about him must be beautiful and full of life. How he loves life!"

She turned sharply, and went a few steps away from Florida, standing with her back turned to her. She did not speak for a minute. Florida stood waiting. After a minute the lady turned again, smiling.

"Will you do just what I want to do all day?" she asked. "Will you give me the whole day, little Flori? Will you stay with me all day and do just what I want to do all day?"

It was a cruel day of wind and driven, blinding snow. The snow rapped like ice upon the castle windows. The tall cypress trees were bent almost to breaking, and the snow froze white upon the darkness of them. Florida knew what such a storm meant to the olive woods; how great trees would be dragged up and splintered, and branches flung wide, tracks of ruin torn down the hillsides. She knew what it meant to the terraces, to the gardens and vineyards, and all the little town's living. In the paese houses the fires could not be lighted, the people would be huddled together for warmth; and such weather was strange to the hills and the people were afraid; they would be crowded together in their dark, chill places to wail over the havoc the storm was making. This day alone meant the winter's hunger for many, and it was only one of many of that season's days as

terrible and cruel. She knew that Vanini would be going from one house to another, wanted here and there, doing little things for everybody. But she would not let herself think of it. Monna Lia needed her, and nothing else mattered.

The west room was full of firelight, and shut very safely away from the storm. The storm beat about it, and could not break in. One was deliciously sheltered in it, shut fast away, not only from the storm but from all the world.

Outside the storm blotted the world out, more and more, till one could not see even the cypresses for its white curtain, and the sense grew stronger of there being no world at all, anywhere, outside this fire-lit room. Through all the day the wind shrieked around the room's little island of quiet, and the snow curtailed it close about. Late in the afternoon the wind died out, and the snow ceased to fall, and one saw the white world, opened wide away, lonely with a loneliness that made yet closer the intimacy of the room. The twilight closed in on the lonely hills, and on the deep-laid white velvet roofs and drifting smoke of the paese, and on the white towers of the cypresses, and the white mounds of the shrubberies in the garden.

At the hour between dog and wolf it was necessary to laugh a great deal. Florida would not let even a minute of that day be sad, and she fought off the spell of the hour. They dined in the stately old dining hall, at a little table Gianin had set close before the roaring fire. Except for the firelight and the light of the candles on the table the great room was in shadow. The fire and the candles lit only for a little space the flamboyant decoration of the thick walls, the baroque ornamentation that the old groins and vaults of the ceiling repudiated; the dull reds and greens of the rug that covered just Florida's and the lady's corner

of the stone floor. Their voices and their laughter seemed to stir the shadows and find echoes in the further darkness. Afterwards in far-off times and places Florida was to remember that one quite happy little dinner they made festa of, every little detail of it, — Gianin hovering over them, radiant because the lady said she was so hungry; the candlelight reflected in the glass of a certain old, prismatic, Venetian bowl that held narcissus, which Monna Lia had pushed over to one corner of the small square table; the brownness of Gianin's omelette he was so proud of; some vague fragrance that hung about the lady's dress; the smell of the burning pine cones and of the narcissus.

The lady would not let her go home that night. She must stay at the castle. She must borrow things, and they would make a just silly, good time of it. They must be like school-girls, talking until all hours.

Now it was Monna Lia who talked and Florida who listened. Now Monna Lia was young, the blossoms of May were about her, the perfect knight came riding. Her love was a shower of gold, gold sunshine, pure as May, free and unmeasured. In the light of it Florida saw the thing that was so wrong, the sin, as a thing set apart from all the world, lifted high. Ten years stood out, all sunlit so, from a darkness. Florida had a sense of a life's darkness behind, and beyond, and of those ten years as a lighted space between. Monna Lia talked only of the lighted time, except once, in a quick phrase that made the rest by contrast stand out the more golden.

"All there was of suffering, I knew," she said. "It seemed to me that there was nothing but suffering to be known; and no hope anywhere. Then he came." Her face was wonderful when she said: "Then he came."

Very late they climbed the steep, narrow winding stairs together, in the candlelight and the cold; and in a big stone room, made habitable by the fire that had been kept all day burning there, they sat on still a long time, talking.

Léonie, the little, quick French maid, had brought the civilization of her Paris into the stone room, and all its sophistication was in her eyes as she watched, while she went about her service, the woman who seemed to be her mistress's friend. She did not know whether to be contemptuous of Florida, as the friend of a woman whose friend one could not be, or loyally grateful to her, because, in spite of that, she somehow loved this mistress. She arranged their guest's room with special pains, and stared too curiously, and spoke too casually, and when she said good-night could not keep a something beseeching out of her manner to Florida, or quite hide her tenderness for the lady. "Madame will sleep to-night?" lingering at the door. "Madame will not take the sleeping draught to-night, but will try to sleep without it? I know that to-night madame can sleep without it."

At last the lady made Florida go to bed, and then afterwards came back to her, to sit on the edge of the bed just as the Monna Lia of make believe, and petted her as if she were a child, and kissed her good-night.

She had never kissed her before. She seemed to have forgotten everything. And when Florida flung eager arms around her neck, and hugged her, laughing, she laughed too and was happy, without fear.

In the morning she came, herself, laughing still, to bring Florida's rolls and coffee. The day was gorgeously clear, all blue and gold, upon a world cut out of marble. While Florida, sitting up in bed, drank her coffee, the castle lady stood at the window

in the bright sunshine. Her delicate face was touched exquisitely with color, the clear transparency of it was very beautiful, all illumined, as if by a light shining within. Youth could not know such happiness as there was in her eyes; it was deeper and more intense than any happiness of youth, it was the happiness that is to be found only beyond much sorrow; that is, after much disillusion, the greatest, the last, illusion. Florida felt how much of it was made of pain. She thought of Illsboro and the little Alicia playing London Bridge.

"Was there ever such a day?" said the lady.

"I am as hungry as a bear," said Florida.

The lady would have her stay through the morning. They went out in the snow to gather green things, branches of pine and laurel, for the vases. The snow was deep in the paths, and trees and shrubs were loaded down with it. The lady stood on tiptoe to gather pine branches, and the branches showered down snow upon her, and she laughed, shaking it out of her hair.

They searched the garden for flowers with which to make the house beautiful, but the storm had left them nothing. Poor January's gift of mimosa and stock and carnations was all robbed from the gardens by the season's special cruelty. They could find only pine and laurel and myrtle with which to make festa in the castle. Florida thought of the wreckage through the country, but the lady only thought of the rooms she could not make beautiful as she would for Illsboro.

They were filling the vases of the west room with such green things as they could find when Gianin brought the telegram. The lady opened it. It seemed as if she never could tear it open. "I can't see," she said, "you tell me." She gave it to Florida.

It was from Illsboro. "Stopping over a few days with people at Cannes. See you soon," it read.

Florida had put down the laurel branches she was arranging to read the telegram; now she went on arranging them. She was conscious of the lady saying to her, in a strange voice: "Please go. If I want you I will send for you. You will come then?"

"Yes," said Florida, and went away without looking at her.

XVII

It was not till after a week that the lady sent for her, and Florida went again to the castle. The lady seemed to be far more ill than when Florida had first come there. She did not speak at all of Illsboro. It happened that the day she sent for her Florida had heard yet again from Alicia, a letter written from Cannes, where she and her mother had arrived for the winter, telling that Illsboro had come out from England with them, was with them now, and what a duck he was. But Florida did not speak to the lady of Alicia's letter.

For two weeks after the lady sent for her she was always at the castle. She had thought Vanini would protest against her going there, he was so relentless in his condemnation of the woman for whom he saw no excuse. But he did not protest, he only watched her curiously, when she came from the castle to him and whatever they were doing in the paese. They were doing a great deal in the paese. It was an intoxication to Florida to find herself so needed as she was then at the castle as much as in the town. At the castle the lady wore the days through pacing the big rooms. Neither she nor Florida spoke ever of that one happy day. There were days when

Florida felt intuitively that there had been a letter from Illsboro, that he was not coming yet, and those were always the worst days. She knew just what he would write: always he'd be coming soon; always the next letter would explain, or he'd tell her when he saw her, and how ripping it would be to see her again.

The weather stayed cruelly cold, and Florida tried to interest Monna Lia in the needs of the poor people, but though the castle lady flung away money and sent food and clothes, she had no interest in giving, nor sympathy, nor understanding; and always she would not go where people looked at her.

She would send for Florida, must see her, and then the moment she came would ask her why she had come.

"Why did you ever come to this place?" she would say. "I thought that here no one would come to look at me. Don't look at me. I thought that here I could hide, that no one would look at me. And just when it is worst, you come and look at me, and see it all. And I cannot bear that any one should see. Talk to me quickly. Don't look at me like that, as if I were a thing to be sorry for. Talk to me. Have you nothing to say? If you have nothing to say, why don't you go away?"

But Florida could not go. It was miserable; she did not know what to do, and yet she so well understood. Sometimes it made the lady angry that she so well understood, as if it were an intrusion. And sometimes — Florida knew — it was the only thing she was glad of or had to count upon.

"It's horrible to me, your kindness, and it's dear to me. I'd hate you if I could, and I'd love you if I could. Don't look at me. Bring your chair closer, so, I like to have you near."

There were whole days when she would sit looking

straight before her, seeming not to know that the girl was there. Perhaps she would keep asking: "What time is it?" and keep saying over and over: "How long the days are! How long it all is!" Sometimes for a whole day she would not speak to Florida; then for days she spoke to her only sharply.

"Why do you sit there looking at the floor? Are you afraid to look at me? Am I so savage that you are afraid to look at me? Why do you come here at all? I know, it is your *fantaisie*. It is your sense of literature. Here's a story for you. Here's a bit of theatre. Don't look at me like that. When you look at me like that you're a whole audience, waiting the moment to hiss or to applaud."

She would say cruel things, and then say: "Oh, I can't help it. I wish I could help it. I wish I could be sorry. But I cannot even be sorry. Why don't you go away?"

One day, when it had been worse than usual, Florida left her, not knowing what to do, and started home through the frozen, silent gardens; but halfway to the garden gate she turned back, and on the terrace she found the lady, standing white and frightened, her fur cloak fallen back from her shoulders.

"I thought you would never come back," said the lady. Then she caught herself up as if she wanted Florida not to notice the desperate way she had said it, and went on, asking why had Florida come back when she had been in such a hurry to go away? And Florida, wrapping the cloak round her shoulders again, making the action a caress, — it always surprised her that she stood so much taller than Monna Lia: the way the older woman had of standing with her head lifted made her seem taller than she really was, — put both arms round her, and said: "I could carry you to the house! And you call me 'little

thing!’ Why, you’re just a bad child, you know, and that’s all, and I shall take care of you, whether or not you like it.”

“Oh, you don’t understand,” said the castle lady; “yet *how* you do understand. I wish you did n’t. It’s when I know how you understand that I can’t bear you. And yet I could n’t bear it without you.” She laughed, and the dimples lightened a moment in her cheeks.

And when Illsboro did come, at last, it was rather dreadful. He had sent no notice of his coming, and Florida was at the castle, on a day of blind rain. The darkness of the day pressed in upon the windows of the west room where she and Monna Lia sat by the fire; Monna Lia in the chaise longue lying back among the cushions, not talking at all, Florida playing solitaire, cheating herself and talking much nonsense.

Suddenly the lady started up, and sat erect, listening, though Florida had heard no sound.

“What is it?” Florida asked. The lady stood up, not answering her, and in a moment Illsboro came in.

He was very big and beautiful. He had thrown off his wet things in the hall, but his hair was tight curled with the damp, and the freshness of the rain came with him into the room. Florida would have thought of him come straight in from the rain, in dripping ulster and great muddy boots, regardless of everything, forgetting everything but the intensity of his return, quick with sympathy for all the long waiting. She would have had him, however absurdly, falling on his knees to kiss the hem of the lady’s dress. Instead he came in as if there were no tragedy about it.

“I say, Mary,” he began, and saw Florida, and

stopped short. "What are you doing here?" he exclaimed.

The lady had forgotten Florida altogether. She went to him, with both hands held out: "Oh, Gerrard, I thought you would never come," she said; but he did not speak to her, or even look at her. "What are you doing here?" he said to Florida.

"Looking for a red ten," said Florida. "There's the nine of clubs, you see —"

She got up and came from behind the table, holding out her hand to Illsboro.

"How do you do? Had you a decent journey? Were n't you drowned coming up the hill?"

The lady had drawn back from Illsboro; her hands, that he had not taken, fallen by her sides. Illsboro still did not look at her. He shook hands with Florida, voiceless, the lady still watching him.

Florida went on: "How did you leave Cannes? Were there lots of people?" She went back to the table and gathered up the cards, evening them together and fitting the pack into its case. "Was there a lot going on? Did you see much of the Duchess of Carstairs? Or is n't she there yet?"

"She is due at the villa next week," said Illsboro. "I, — I say, — Mrs. Marvin, I did n't know you were here."

"Oh, I was here before you ever heard of Coll' Alta," said Florida. "If I'd known at the Manor that you'd seized my castle, how I should have raged. You need n't think you can hold it against me. — Monna Lia, I'm going home. May I leave my painting things behind? I don't want to carry them now in the rain, and I'll come back for them some time to-morrow."

"I'll send my man to you with them," said Illsboro; "so you need n't bother about coming back." With-

out any more words he made the thing quite final and inevitable. "Is this cloak yours? Had you no hat? No umbrella?"

The lady had turned away from them and gone over to the fire. She was standing by it with her back to the room. She stood, with one hand on the mantel and her head bent, looking into the fire, a terrible apartness from them in her very attitude. Florida could not go and leave her like that. Perhaps it would have been kinder to go, but at the moment she did not think of that, she only felt things.

She went to Monna Lia. "You have been so good to me, I have so loved coming here. I want to thank you," she said. She took the lady's hand and kissed it. "There is no one like you," she said.

The lady dragged her hand away and hid it in the long folds of her dress. Illsboro stood waiting with Florida's cloak. There was absolutely nothing to be done about it, the hopelessness of the thing was there, in its dreadful courtesy and commonplaceness. It was such tragedy and without a tragic geste or word.

He went out to the hall with Florida. "You really ought to have an umbrella," he said. But she turned and ran down through the garden blindly.

At the gate Vanini was waiting in the rain, his coat collar turned up, his shabby hat pulled low over his eyes.

"You were waiting for me?"

"Yes, Signorina."

"How did you know I wanted you?"

"I knew *he* had come back, Signorina, and I knew what that meant, and I thought that perhaps, for the moment, just for the moment, you would have no one else but me."

Because of something in the way he said it she

realized, as she had never realized before, how much she had come to mean to this Stranger, and the thought comforted her in her moment's utter loneliness and need. She was grateful to him that it should be so. He meant much to her; that, too, she realized, more than ever before, and she turned to him eagerly. She had had a glimpse back into the world she had left, and had seen again, it seemed to her, how utterly she did not belong to it. This wide, dim world here that she had come to, and did want so to belong in, the castle lady had made seem a sad place to one on the edge of it, looking in. She felt lost and strange. If anything were real to her, and mattered to her in her life just then, it was that Vanini had taken thought of her.

XVIII

At the castle there had come, so it seemed, the end of a friendship that had been strange enough, and illusive, painful almost, and yet one that had meant more to Florida than most else in her life. In her first desperate lack, she turned more than ever completely to Vanini, not caring any more what happened. Vanini was her only friend and refuge, and she absolutely fled to him.

"Vanini, Vanini," she would say, "it's worse than ever. I hate that world; and it's everywhere except with you. It's only with you that I get away from that world. Keep me with you in your world, away from that other."

She was to get far enough away from that other world, surely, in the days which followed.

"And in this world," he said to her, over and over again, "in this world that you call mine, Signorina, do you find life worth going on with?"

She cried it out to him: "Oh, yes, yes, yes!" for at his voice she had begun to thrill with an enthusiasm she did not understand or realize.

All her life she had given so much more than she had ever received; and now here was a man who, while he asked of her just the eagerness and joy of life she had so long suppressed but now so gladly gave, returned to her (yet not in return: there was no question of exchange: he would have given it still had she given nothing to him) a whole wealth of adoration. Vanini opened doors wide for her, showing her long perspectives, bringing her into close touch with a life that was warm and quick to respond; a life too that was always beautifully or dreadfully intense; a world where chattering voices were drowned in sobbing and singing, and the sobbing and the singing together — Florida never laughed at herself for her fantastic sense of it — swung out to their part in the music of the spheres.

"What does one's self matter?" Vanini asked of her sometimes, when something, perhaps a letter from Jack, or perhaps just a thought of him, brought back upon her the unhappiness she never spoke of, that she had no idea Vanini guessed at, but that he felt with a sympathy he never expressed. "What does anything matter? It's all part of an infinite, an eternal whole. Outside there is peace. We are like people in a house of fever, but 'from hence we shall go out among the stars.'"

If, again, she had not so loved Jack, probably she would not have so loved Vanini. If she had not been so tired out as she was with loving, she would not have been so grateful for love given her. She belonged so absolutely to another world than Vanini's that she trod his world as in a stronghold, secure as in an air castle from disturbing things. In his world

he was master, — master and yet servant. He gave time, strength, understanding, sympathy. He gave his life as he went hungry, or cold as he went tired, that others might have his bread and his cloak.

The snow was white on the mountains in the clear cold days that followed, and fresh snows came to the paese in blinding storms that fairly hurled one under. It lay white on the roofs of the houses, or turned black in the streets, trodden into the mud. The dampness rose from the melted snow and the mud, and the streets steamed wet and thick with it. It got into the houses, filled the stone rooms, choked the fires and the oil lights. Everything, all illness and evil, stayed and lingered in the thick heavy air. Then the wind would spring up in a moment, and the wet air that had soaked into the very depths of one's heart, would turn icy till one's heart froze in it. The pools in the piazza froze hard over, and a dust powdered by age-long goings up and down of footsteps, the crumbling of a thousand lives, filled full of the malia out of a thousand graves of the past, blew over it. Emotionally, fantastically, this malia was an atmosphere all about the work there was for Florida to do.

She and Vanini worked hard together these days. It was over small things that they worked, to be sure, — somebody's food, somebody's fire, somebody's medicine. Evil came with misery. There seemed very little use in fighting the evil when the misery could not be fought, for all the evil was the misery. The next-door neighbor stole Soeu' Teré's bread because her children were hungry; Soeu' Teré stole the Signorina's purse because she was hungry. There were little good things too. Rina Moti, sullen, unresponsive, once, only once, but it mattered, said: "The Signorina is good to me." Marietta would leave the piazza's admiring audience for hours to

search the terraces for wild flowers that were not there, for the Signorina. Toinetta would kneel, worshipping her baby, while the Signorina held him, with a worship which included the Signorina. Soeu' Teré smiled toothlessly upon the Signorina she had robbed, and wished her every time she saw her, "tante belle cose," with a gesture of claw-like hands that made as if to shower beautiful things upon her. Women whose names Florida did not really know, whose faces were only dimly familiar, came out to her from the doorways and asked her to come into their houses. There was one poor old woman who wanted the Signorina just to come into her room, that always afterwards she might remember her there. There was a sick child who would be better, its mother knew, if only the Signorina would come and sit for a little while by it. The men turned from their work, or even from their leisure, glad of a word with her. The reverendo came to be glad of her friendship with the paese girls, careless as it seemed, seeming to consist all of chatter and laughter. Master Cock grew more and more glad of the help she gave with his sick people. The schoolmaster would stop lessons when she came to the school, that she might talk to the children, and the children would always listen interested.

"Go to the blackboard, Pippo Ceruti," she would say; "write there what I tell you. Write plainly so that all the boys can read. Write down: 'If I were the little black dog, lame because the boys had stoned me and broken my leg, and very sick because my broken leg hurt so, and starving because nobody ever gave me a bite to eat, with nowhere to sleep except on the icy stones, what should I like some boy who thought about things to do for me?' Diego, you've had a broken leg and know how it

hurts; stand up there as tall as ever you can and answer." What triumph there seemed to be for her in the eagerness of the small boy's answer!

She made festa sometimes for the school children, a bag of sweets for each child, and games in the piazza, and a bowl of hot chocolate for every one up in Chichetta's rooms. The fathers of the children looked on as kindly as the mothers, and fathers and mothers came to be very worshipful of one who was good to the babies. The people who knew no middle way of it, who either hated or adored, who did nothing moderately or reasonably, came to give her just what then in her life she most needed. She loved their love for her, and their crude ways of showing it. Every forlorn little gift of chestnut paste and dried figs, of something clumsily carved out of olive wood or hacked out of the hill's quartz had value for her, — as had the very dumbness of brown eyes and the roughness of a clutch on her hand.

Yet all the time she was savagely unhappy in her missing of the castle lady, and rebellious against the need that kept her from her, and threw herself the more into a mood that was of Vanini's conjuring, a mood too high strung, seeing the world too overwrought, having wonder in it. Never had she felt so near drawn to the heart of things, so close to deep mysterious sources of — she knew not what. The meaning beyond words that is in things was sensible, almost tangible, to her in those days. She could have expressed nothing, but she felt intensely those things that are beyond expression, those things that are close to one in such times as this was to her, subtle, exalted times; in the smell of the earth under rain, in the light of the sun on the hills, in the sound of the wind through the trees, in the taste of the morning's coffee, the glow of the fire at twilight,

in the laughter of the children out of school, the chatter of the women at the fountain, in the whistle of a caged blackbird, the shout of a donkey driver climbing the hill, the clamor of bells above the other sounds.

There were other days when everything was real and grim and disillusioned; when the mountains were no more dream mountains, but scarred rocks, terraced, toiled over through ages of weariness and hunger and aching backs and bruised hands; when the paese was not a wonderful thing of light and shadow and color, but a cold, dirty, miserable, sordid place, where creatures struggled to live, and there was no illusion anywhere, not in one's heart, not anywhere. And there were days too when one saw the terraced hills in the blue haze, with a most beautiful meaning of dreams; when it seemed as if one could live on just the world's beauty, that alone, its lights and shadows and sounds and fragrances sufficing, as if there were no need of people — or rather as if there was need of people just as part in the infinite whole of things, to be loved as the sky and hills were to be loved, with a love that made for quietness and peace. In those days the hills seemed to be trodden by the feet of the gods, not the less gorgeously because they were too the labored hills of man, that had taken from man's life something of him into themselves, and were grown patient, obedient, enduring, poor, old, great hills, conquered as man must come to be.

Or, in the paese, she would sit on the church steps by Soeu' Teré, and feel the value of the things that happened: — how when big, young Antonio, the carpenter, came out of the house, off to his work of a morning, his little blonde wife ran after him to kiss him good-bye in the piazza; how somebody's round, fat, sweet, dirty baby tumbled down, as it toddled

across the piazza, and sat weeping, and old Agatha Fairlo, who never had had a child, ran to gather it up and cuddle it, her cheek against its cheek; how the reverendo came out of the church, in scarlet and lace, carrying the Sacrament to one who was dying, and little brown-faced Zan Cursi, holding the red umbrella, made faces behind the reverendo's back at the tailor's girl as she sat sewing in the doorway; how Beppi Manzoni, bringing the mule out from the cave under the house and overloading him with sacks of fodder, thought to stick a red feather jauntily behind his ear, and how Pippo Bronzi passed for the first time, in his brave uniform of Corporal of the Bersiglieri, and all the piazza beamed in admiration and pride, except Maria Pia, the tailor's girl, who loved him, and looked at him with grave eyes, picturing battles. In such times each day was a new wonder to Florida, its every detail of a beautiful importance. She had always loved the garden, but it was Vanini who taught her to love the piazza.

She would go often to Chichetta's rooms. Vanini was seldom there, but when he did come in, to find her with Chichetta or the old mother, his pleasure in finding her there made her feel that she had brought some honor to the room. Sometimes she and he would stand for a little at the window and watch the piazza: those were nice little times, they laughed so intimately together, or pitied so silently the little tragedies of the piazza. From the windows one looked straight across the piazza to the church, and always one wondered how time and storm and light and shadow could have made of it so beautiful a thing. It was the typical seventeenth century church of the Ligurian hills, a plain façade, a rounded gable with deep moldings, a window of three round-topped lights, the centre one the tallest, over the door with its leathern curtain, and several

broad steps, where the world of the paese sat gossiping or stretched itself to sleep. The campanile stood tall over the church, its three storeys, each higher one lighter than the one below, divided by broad cornices that gave deep shadow and were quite plain, pierced each in each of its four sides by a tall, round-topped window. Looking over to the campanile from Chichetta's window, one saw through the windows of the lower storey the silver sheen of the olives on the hillside behind it, and through the second storey the big time-stained bell, and through the third, the sky.

In the little square stage of the piazza the town showed all its life; all the sounds of the piazza together there were as the voice of the town itself. There was the getting off to work in the morning; the opening and shutting of doors; the calling to passers-by; the stamping of mules as they stood to be loaded; the bells of the morning Ave Maria; the clatter of wooden sandals; the chatter of the children getting off to school; the men setting out for work, the women for market. Thither, of a morning, came the people of the country roundabout, bringing in always the same things to sell, — wine and dried chestnuts, peas and figs, — spreading the contents of their baskets upon the stones. More rarely, there came peddlers from the big roads of the towns by the sea, toiling up with their push-carts, while the paese women crowded around to finger cottons and woolens, pots and pans and brushes, always with the same babel of voices, disputing values and prices. At noon came the bells again, and the children out of school, with the racket of their games, — *mosca cieca* and *riempiato*; then, after recess, quiet for a time, till the women came out to the fountain, with copper or earthen jars poised splendidly on their heads, up the steep street, to the fountain. The

old people came, brown and bent, climbing their hard way under great bundles of grass and twigs from the olive woods. The dogs and babies tumbled about together. Came home the mules loaded with fodder or firwood, wine barrels, sacks of flour, clattering over the cobbles. Then the bells would ring again, now for the Ave Maria of the evening, and the church exhaled its odors of candles and incense, dusk and the breath of years of prayers from under the leathern curtain. The children came back from school, their little shrill voices singing and shouting, their wooden sandals clumping and shuffling on the stones. The crash of the balls where the men played pallone, over at Settinella's, would break through the monotonous rise and fall of voices from the caffè's open door. Darkness would come. The mutter of the men's voices from the caffè would go on and on deep into the night.

Florida, in Chichetta's room, always felt, as she listened, that the paese showed its life very specially to her. Little things in those days had for her a strange importance. She always especially remembered the day the vessel-mender came to the piazza, though there was no reason whatever for especially remembering it. The vessel-mender built his fire under the dark old archway of the Via della Porta. The flames glowed and leaped in the dusk there. It was a dark day. The light glowed far out into the piazza. The fire was a beautiful thing, — yellow-gold, transparent flames, red gold, gleaming hot ashes.

The vessel-mender sat with his melting-pots and ladle and molds for casting, a picturesque, brigandish person, muffled in a red knitted scarf against the cold. The paese came bringing its brasses and coppers to be mended, — candlesticks and braziers, big water jars, the bowls in which the women carried their wet

linen to and from the lavatoio, the same conche the Roman women had carried on their heads in the same way up and down the same steep paths, the same lamps and lanterns they had used for the lighting of dark archways that were the same as ancient days. The colors of brass and copper and bronze were beautiful in the firelight. People from cabins far off in the hills brought queer old vessels to be mended, things without names, of which Florida could not guess the use.

She and Vanini went down from Chichetta's room, and joined the group around the vessel-mender. There was an old woman, from somewhere back in the hills, whose scaldino had been mended so many times that it simply could not be mended again. She sat down on the stones and wept over it.

"Will you give her yours, Signorina?" asked Vanini.

"Oh, Vanini, mine is so old and beautiful. I will give her the money."

"No," said Vanini, "give her the scaldino. I will go to the garden house and fetch it. With the money take as many people as you can of those who come from far away into the caffè and give them hot soup."

"But I want my scaldino," said Florida, laughing and half annoyed.

"You have a fire," he said, as he swung off.

There were other gifts that Florida must make too. Marietta had wanted a string of red corals; quite frankly she had wanted the Signorina's red corals. "If only I had delle rose like the Signorina's, I am sure that Beppe Mansonì would marry me," she pleaded. "The *rose* of the Signorina pass twice around the throat, and those of the girl from Ventimiglia only once."

Florida gave her the *rose*, and then she was so

beautiful that her ambition soared beyond Beppo, and she smiled with patronizing interest when it was told her he was to marry that girl from Ventimiglia.

The girl from Ventimiglia came up occasionally to the paese with her father, helping push the two-wheeled cart full of coarse cotton and flannel and woolen stuffs. She had a smart air gained by travel. She knew towns near the railroad, roads that were white and deep in the dust of automobiles, and caffès that set their tables out on the pavement, under striped awnings, between orange trees in green tubs. The women of the paese crowded about to see her father's wares and gather her worldly wisdom. The girl from Ventimiglia had such contempt for the paese women that they accepted with absolute confidence her judgment in matters of red stripes or yellow dots. She was a great person, and the day Beppo Pasodi made everybody drink her health with him in the caffè, she would have made a fine effect indeed, had not Marietta been so beautiful and radiant in the red corals, and laughed so gayly that every one looked at her instead of at the girl from Ventimiglia, and so contemptuously that afterwards, outside in the piazza, people began to think that the dot was too expensive, and to question if the stripe would wear.

The days of late January, with their great winds, brought clearness to the mountains, and at sunset the distant views were gorgeous with amethyst and topaz and ruby, and the lights and shadows were wonderful under the olives.

Vanini had a love of outdoors that one somehow would not have expected in him. There were days when he must go up high into the hills. He had a love of the mountains, of getting up into high places and looking down upon things, that made Florida

remember how many of the world-great people, since the Voice spoke unto Moses, had gone up into mountains to see their god.

There was a little chapel on the hillside, used perhaps once a year, when the reverendo carried the host there in procession on the day of its saint. On that day the paese people followed, chanting, and naughty little freckled Zan Cursi carried the red umbrella over the head of the reverendo, in his scarlet and lace, and another Zan, son of the Vedova Bronzini, went before swinging the incense. But on all other days of the year the chapel stood empty, its door closed but not locked. One day Florida and Vanini wandered into this chapel. The cobwebs were thick over its windows and upon the great rough crucifix opposite the door. The floor and walls were deep in dust. One could not at all make out the figures that had once been brightly painted on the walls. Florida could fancy the old gods of the hills, forsaken and grown timid, creeping sometimes into the chapel to look at the Man on the black Cross, the light-hearted, beautiful old gods, who had been so absolutely gods of youth and strength and pleasure, and all of them once so proud, looking a little wistfully, and standing a little timid before the Man who had known what they had not known, — Sorrow, a strange thing.

"Sorrow," she said aloud, not meaning to talk to Vanini, but to herself, as she often did with him. "Sorrow, that is what He knew, and the old gods did n't know."

Vanini said slowly: "It's because of that, and because of that only, that one — if one believes at all — forgives him."

The wistfulness she had seen in the Stranger's face when he spoke to the reverendo came back to it then.

His rough dress always seemed to her to give the extreme delicacy of his face a special force of contrast. Now, in the dusty light of the chapel, against the dim-colored wall, his clear face was illumined as if it were transparent, and his spirit, all alight, as it were, shone through. "Knowledge of sorrow," he said, looking at the Man on the Cross; "sorrow, a beautiful, perhaps the most beautiful, thing."

"But it's so needless, sorrow," she cried to him, out of her youth and strength and love of life, rebelliously. "Why must it be? Why must a faith be based on it? To hang on a black cross, with outstretched arms, and suffer, — it's without right, without reason. Why must it be?" She stood before the big black crucifix and asked of Vanini, "Why?"

Vanini only said: "We may understand, a little, *why*, Signorina, when we have come to certain places in our lives."

She would not stay longer that day in the chapel, and went out, with her head high, in anger at the cult of sorrow. But afterwards she went back often to the chapel alone. She fancied the old gods wondering about the Man on the Cross, that He should be forsaken too. "A Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." Somehow the words made her go back often to the chapel, and take flowers from the garden to the God who was — if, as Vanini said, he was at all — nearer there than where he was worshiped with sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

It was the day she and Vanini went together to the chapel that a rather odd little thing happened. They were coming down the path behind the castle. It was a dull, heavy day, — one of those days when one feels for no reason a sense of disaster impending.

A mule, overladen with sacks of flour, came up the

narrow path, and Florida and Vanini stood back against the wall of the castle gardens just below the gate to let it pass. The mule-driver's "Bona seira" left a trail of garlic in the lifeless air. Florida happened to look back over her shoulder and saw that the man crossed himself as he passed the gate. She went on with Vanini, wondering if she were very stupid to feel fear at that.

All the way along with them went the little soft sound and the bright glimmer of the water running beside the path in the old stone aqueduct. The sound was like a little soft voice saying something over and over, trying to make them understand. It was the one thing that meant life to the town, and whatever there was in the town's life of clearness and quickening, it had always seemed to Florida to symbolize. In the land where there is little that is clear or that quickens, where the lights are veiled to mystery, and live men have something of death always in them, left in their blood and in their hearts as their inheritance from dead empires, the country where the dead are less deeply buried than the living, and there are influences as mysterious as the lights and miasma, and the sunshine is laden with the grave dust of ages, — little clear quick waters have special meaning.

The women had left the lavatoio, all but Giulin, who was packing her wet linen into her big bronze concha, and Soeu' Teré, who stood watching her.

The old woman came forward to meet Florida and Vanini in the path, and said to the Signorina, as if in answer to a question from her: "It is not tainted water. I tell them all it is not tainted."

"Who said it was tainted?" asked Florida sharply, remembering the morning weeks ago.

"No one said it," answered Giulin. "No one said

it; but she keeps on repeating that. We do not know what put it into her head," and she crossed herself, like the mule-driver.

XIX

ONE morning, in the twilight just before dawn, Florida went up to the piazza to the house of Chichetta. The day before she had had a postal card from Jack. He had been at Palm Beach with some people, and apparently he had happened somehow to think of her. She had gone about all day with the thought of that — that he had thought of her — kept steadily off by a desperate crowding in of other things. But at night there had been no keeping it out. Alone and in the silence she had been without defense against thought. And all night, in the room where of old times she had found happiness just because the walls were so quaintly painted and the fire-light so soft upon them, there had been with her, as over and over again through all this winter it had been, mercilessly, the ever renewed and terrible old tragedy of hope. He had thought of her, perhaps he would miss her; there had been a postal card, perhaps there would be a letter. If only there would be, and yet if only there would n't ever be. If only he would come, or if only he would n't write to her.

He wrote so rarely that in the times between his letters, it seemed to her as if, almost, she could forget. She would just grow used to not finding a letter in the post, just succeed in making herself not watch the path for Pascà's boy, trudging up from Colla Bassa, just persuade herself that she could take her letters from him without fearing or hoping or caring, — and then there'd be an envelope stamped from

America and scrawled over in Jack's big writing. And it would be just the letter, "sweet," as she'd have said it, that made things begin all over again, as his voice, or his smile — had he bothered to make them sweet for her — would have done. And she'd stay awake such nights through, and the world would seem horrible.

The morning, when at last it came, very cold and clear, cutting in between the slats of the blinds, had seemed to her most horrible, and she wanted some one to talk to — not about that, just about anything to forget that — and she went to Vanini. She could go to any one she pleased, at dawn if she would, in any however unconventional way; it concerned nobody. There was all freedom for her, in that nobody cared.

In the beautiful strange light next before dawn she let herself out of the house, that was yet asleep, and went through the silent, frosty, shadowless garden, and climbed the hill path, hurrying. She was glad that there was Vanini. She wanted to get to him quickly, and say: "I am glad that you are in the world."

She stopped before she came to Toinetta's cabin, and stood in the frozen path to watch the sun lift its great copper red disk over the castle roofs, and to see the hills, lying away and away to the sky, fill as the sky was filled with opal tints. There was nobody to keep her from taking of its beauty; nobody to mean more to her than the beauty meant; nobody whose different life she need live in, whose different ideals she need follow. There was nobody she need turn to from sunrises and sunsets; nobody to hurt her by giving what most she longed for to some one else; nobody to be impatient if her wanting of the things she valued were too strong for her. There was nobody

to dispel her mood of refuge with a look or a word; nobody at whose geste the Ivory Tower need vanish away. Her mood was her own and the Tower was her own, if only she could completely forget. But forgetting was only a half loaf, giving her just too much and just not enough, as everything else, it seemed to her, in her life had been given her. She drew her furs close about her in the cold, still air. There was the vast quiet that comes often before the coming up of mistral. She heard in the stillness a twig crack somewhere. The sunrise was utterly beautiful. But the beauty only hurt her, savagely, because her love of it was no more than a half loaf, and only half helped her to forget. She ran the rest of the way up to the piazza as if she were running from thought and memories.

Chichetta came to the door. "Vanini is not here, Signorina; he is out already," she said. "He has become a mule-driver, among other occupations. He has gone down to Colla Bassa to get the Sindico's oil jars off by diligence, because the Sindico's mule boy's mother is ill, and the mule boy was crying that he must go down with the oil jars and leave her alone." Chichetta's long gold earrings shook and gleamed with wrath in the light of the candle she held above her head as she stood in the shadows of the doorway. "Oh, he is bad, that Vanini; he was up all night with — who knows who it is that is most ill now of this wretched town? — and then he was off again hours before dawn doing the work of a mule-driver. He must soon be back; would not the Signorina come in?"

They went up the stairs that were still full of darkness. At each turn a tall window looked from the landing to the piazza, and from each there was a different seeing of it, a change of lights and

shadows upon its grouping of wall and roof and chimney. Night was yet deep in the piazza. The campanile stood up out of darkness as out of some cold pool. The sky behind the gable of the church and through the two upper openings of the campanile, was all aglow with dawn, the hills were yet purple and dark against it, but the castle, higher and to the left among the olives, caught the glow in all its windows. It was very cold on the stone stairs. The life the stairs led up to was remote and strange enough to give one chance and right too, it seemed, to more than the half loaf of freedom. What space there was for one's soul's flinging out, soaring up! What might not one reach of one's desire, wide and high? Florida, as she climbed the cold stone dark stairs, had a vivid consciousness, an almost physical realization of freedom; of freedom to feel, to do, — she did not yet know what. She was very unhappy, and she was very happy; and nothing mattered, and everything mattered intensely; and she did not at all understand.

As she followed Chichetta into the living-room, the great bell of the campanile began to ring. Chichetta crossed herself. The reverendo would have gone in to open the church, his round, jolly old face nicely washed and shining, rosy with haste, the thought of breakfast pleasantly with him, his tonaca buttoned awry. The Christ, in the gilt plaster glory over the altar, would be patiently waiting for men and women who might be coming in on their way to work to put down their burdens and the tools of their labor and kneel before him for half a minute. Chichetta crossed herself, saying: "Name of Father, Son, Holy Ghost, Amen. — Will the Signorina but look at the coat Vanini has left for me to mend! A touch and it will fall to bits! And when I have mended it, if I can

mend it, he will give it to some good-for-nothing, and go himself without till he gets a chill I must nurse him through, — unless he has got the chill this morning, and dies before he has time to go that little much madder. Will not the Signorina sit here by the oven and warm herself? ”

She opened the door of the stone oven, in which the fire was already burning well, and let the glow of it out into the room. It was a quite large room. The vaulting of the ceiling was beautiful, and so was the old, warm, red brick floor, and the wood-work, dark and carefully carved as such work was done in the old times. The poverty of the room took nothing from its beauty but belonged in it, and gave one a sense of the necessity that makes harmony.

Florida went to the oven and stood holding her hands out to warm them. “What shall you have for breakfast?” she asked. “Is there polenta? I am hungry.”

Just then there was a small scratching sound at the door, and Chichetta opened it. A very little, dirty, ragged boy with a face as old as a mummy’s, stood there rubbing his eyes.

“Pippo,” said Chichetta to him sternly; “Pippo, thou didst drink too much wine again last night.”

“There was no food,” said Pippo, “and there was wine, and I drank much because I was hungry. Where is Vanini? I did not come to talk to women. I am in great trouble, but it is no affair for women. Where is Vanini?”

“He will come presently. You may have some breakfast.”

“I want no breakfast.” Pippo seated himself upon the floor. “Who is that person?” he asked, pointing with his thumb at Florida.

“It is of no use correcting him,” said Chichetta,

going about her work; "he is rude and bad and Vanini is a fool."

Florida went to the child and tried to get him to talk to her, but he would not. He was very anxious, he said; it was a terrible affair, but it was not an affair for women. He sat still as a mouse.

Chichetta grumbled over her work of the morning. Vanini gave her much extra work to grumble over, cooking for all the town beggars, besides making clothes for every good-for-nothing. But when Vanini's forlorn clients began to straggle in, she was so kind that one would scarcely have known her for the hard, snappy little Chichetta.

The Signorina found herself too washing dirty baby faces and holding the coffee bowl for shaking old hands. There was so much that was real to do. She had a sense of infinite reason to go on, as she tried to make Pippo eat his polenta. The little boy would not eat, only when at last Vanini came he sprang up with a scream and flew to him.

"Vanini, Vanini, they are yet shut up there in the back room, and it yet feels so still about the door. You must break in the door. For always they lock it inside and throw the key out of the window. They broke the lamp and fought with their knives in the dark. I heard them when I was drinking the wine they had left in their glasses. They were playing morra. I was under the chest because it was warm in the room."

"In what room," asked Vanini, quietly; "in Franzé's?"

"Yes, I followed my father there; I was afraid to stay alone at home."

"I go at once," said Vanini.

Chichetta, clutching his arm, said: "It may be a very ugly thing, Vanini."

"Don't go," begged Florida, only a little understanding. "Don't go, Vanini; let the police —"

Vanini, not hearing her, already was halfway down the stairs. Chichetta and Florida ran after him, but he sent them back.

"He says we must be quiet," said Chichetta, coming in with the little boy, "and not let people know, if it can be helped. It may not be so bad, or it may be worse. He wants to keep it from the police."

She shut the door behind her as she pushed Pippo into the room. The child, again in his grim little silence, went back to where he had been sitting before Vanini came, on the floor.

"But there may be such danger," said the Signorina, "for Vanini. Chichetta, it is terrible, his going there like that, alone."

Chichetta's shrugged shoulders did not mean indifference, only hopelessness. "What can one do, Signorina? If the police come to know of it there is danger for the whole town."

Florida knew that in the paese playing morra was forbidden by the authorities because it led to just such things as this thing seemed to be, — to men's shutting themselves up with their knives, to fight, perhaps to the death, in a locked, dark room; and she knew that such a thing as this meant terribly much to the paese and would have terrible consequences. She knew that Chichetta was afraid, while yet she went quietly about and made coffee and cut the bread. She tried to comfort Pippo, but he refused comfort. He huddled himself in a heap on the floor in a corner and shrugged her away when she came near.

The old mother hobbled in, wrapped in a big bright-red shawl, and must hear all about it. She was so excited that she almost forgot her polenta and coffee. Pippo would not eat, but crouched, watching the door

for Vanini to come back. His quiet seemed sinister to Florida, and so did the old woman's excitement, and Chichetta's moving uselessly about the room. The old mother, who had that special beauty of bone of brow and jaw and shoulder line that one sees often among the Italian peasant women, which age and hardship scarcely lessen, told stories of things she had known in her youth, when the paese was almost without law. Florida, following the dialect with difficulty, felt more than ever the force of a past that had never buried its dead; of influences left over from it; of savageries, frenzies, passions living on in the rooms and the streets, emanations from walls that had closed them in through ages; left in the soil in which man's life had been too long rooted and too deeply, and in the air that never changed but held things lingering heavily on in it. The fear that had always been part in what she *felt* of Italy—that curious, reasonless, indefinable fear that always, in all her love of the land, would come upon her at sudden moments, for no other reason perhaps than because of some note in the piazza's voice; some sight of a gray, naked, distorted fig tree standing out dead against the live green of the olives; some clot of mist swaying white over an old well on a still, close evening—came to her now, a very real terror, while she sat only half listening to the old woman's stories. She had, more vividly than ever, the sense that things fantastic elsewhere were actual here. Here it was not just that one heard of things, but that dangers and forces and mysteries still existed all about one. The morning stir of the piazza came to them in the room, and Florida found herself intensely listening for some sound in it that might have meaning of the thing that had happened. After a while, perhaps half an hour after Vanini had gone, it came, quite suddenly, different from the piazza's usual

sounds, and quite distinct among them, a horror in one voice caught up into many voices, the sound of one person's footstep pursued and crowded about with many others. Waiting there in the room, one knew that the thing had indeed been bad, that Vanini had not been able to keep it hidden.

The piazza filled rapidly with sound that menaced. Chichetta went out to the gathering crowd there. Florida waited on in the room with the old mother and the little boy. The voices of the piazza frightened her in a way she could not have explained. She went to the window, and the one glimpse she had of the crowd there, the figures and faces and gestures, was so dreadful to her that she drew in the blinds, closing them fast, and the windows, and sat with the old woman and the boy in a green gloom. The voice of the piazza came to them through the closed windows. It was horrible, waiting there and listening, she did not know quite why: the thing that had happened was bad enough, but it was more than *that* that frightened her. It was something that came from far behind this trouble of the morra.

The old mother kept saying: "With whom is it they are angry? They sound like mad dogs. At whom can it be they growl? Who is it that has driven them mad?" She kept saying it over and over. Florida tried not to listen, but stayed on, instead of going home to the garden house, because of some idea she had that Vanini might need her, or that, at least, when he came back he might be glad to find her there. She kept going over and over in her imagination what the thing would be that was happening, and what Vanini would have to do in it. She saw the street where Franzé lived, — one of the streets on the edge of the town, tunneled under the castle's old fortifications, almost dark, wet always, what little of

light came into it glistening in the wet; she saw Franzé's door, shut, and Vanini before it, keeping the people from breaking it open; she saw the people crowding, their faces upturned to him; she saw the faces, and she saw, inside the house, the back room that the police would be afraid of, — death there, horribly, perhaps, and perhaps danger, very real and ugly danger, for such fighting, with perhaps death in it, would mean surely yet more fighting and yet more death to the paese. Vengeance was not just a threat there. Vanini would fling himself into the thing, she knew; would feel with this one and with that one, and make the suffering and the sin his own. He would feel everything, — the influences of the dark and the cold; the fear of what was in men's faces, and understanding of it; the pity for them, and the love, in spite of all things; the great desire to help, the pain at his helplessness. She knew how he would feel, with an actual, physical sense of it. She saw, it seemed to her, actually, the disorder of that back room of Franzé's, the lamp broken on the floor, — all. There were many times in the years after when she remembered that day. There were times when she wanted just to speak of it, to be able to tell some one of it, and of what Vanini in it had meant to her, as she sat there in the green gloom, listening to the voice of the piazza.

After a while Chichetta came back. It had been very bad. One of the men had been badly wounded, and one, Franzé, only slightly; both were under arrest, and two, one of them the father of Pippo, were dead. She whispered it that Pippo might not hear.

"What is Vanini doing?" Florida asked.

"Trying to keep the people quiet," answered Chichetta; "to separate them and make them go their

ways. The danger is in their getting together and talking; a very great danger."

She took off her shawl and began to fold it and put it away, and then just flung it down anywhere, and went over to the door to draw the bolts. The bolts were rusty, they had been so long unused, and creaked fearfully in the still house. Chichetta went and stood warming her hands at the open door of the stone oven, and Florida came across the room and stood by her in the red glow that gave no comfort.

"Chichetta," she said, "what is it? There is something more that is wrong than just this."

"It is the anger that is let loose," said Chichetta, shivering. "*This* has stirred what has long been waiting, Signorina. Things that are deep down in men's hearts this has brought to the top. Something has been the matter with us all for a long time. That no one knows what it is makes it worse. Now if the people keep together and excite one another and frighten one another there will be trouble. And no one knows what the trouble will be. You hear in their voices the thing they do not know."

"It is a bad thing," chimed in the old mother, rocking herself back and forth; "a bad thing indeed it is, that one hears in their voices."

Chichetta went on: "The wife of the wounded man thinks she wants to kill Franzé. She thinks that it's because her man is hurt; but it is not so much because her man is hurt, or because Franzé did it, as because she has in her heart the wish to kill. Franzé's friends want to fight the police, who have arrested everybody, and they do not know that it is something more than the police they have long wanted to fight. One of them, Settinella, hit the captain of the police with a hatchet, and broke his arm, and got away,

and is hiding somewhere." She turned her face, as they stood together, from the Signorina, and went on talking, not in her usual quick, sharp, nervous way, but slowly, as if she were thinking over her words, and heavily, as if with a burden of meaning. "And they say that the cause of all this too is something the castle lady has done; something they all keep on talking about, but nobody understands. Yesterday she came to the paese for the first time since Toinetta's baby was ill, and passed Franzé's house, it seems. One cannot make out more than that, but that is enough for people so mad. The something that has long been deep in their hearts this has brought out, and has turned to a great madness against the castle lady. All that has been kept down so long has risen, and turned upon her. Signorina, can the Signorina understand what we, suffering, feel against those that have more than we, and give no thought to us? How hatred has been turned upon her by — who knows what of injustice or of truth? Vanini managed to keep them quiet when they would have gone to the castle, a crowd of them, from Franzé's door. Perhaps he can get them quiet now in the piazza."

"But if he can't?" asked Florida.

Chichetta's upthrowing of both hands answered her. There was all hopelessness in it, not to be helped by to-day's civilization, or anything from outside. Florida felt there was no thought of any help other than Vanini's.

It never occurred to her there could be any outside help against this potency of age-long, walled-in, concentrated superstition in the little town so isolated from all the world, so unconsidered and unrestrained, so unchanged within a thousand years. It was no wordable, tangible thing that must be dealt with

here, but rather some influence of the dead who here lived on in men's hearts and made them inevitably what they were. The old sense of malia was strong upon her, like the miasma that rose from all the land's hollows and its waters, the dust that in age and decay crumbled from all its walls. She shivered like Chichetta.

"There is nothing to be done," said the old mother; "nothing whatever to be done."

"No," said Chichetta, turning away from the fire; "there is nothing whatever to be done."

"If I went to the castle —" began Florida, and then knew that that would only make things worse. It was as if one move might set in motion a train of things difficult to stop. She broke off, and went and stood at the window. Somehow she felt that, dreading even as she did to look out, she must see Vanini. She unhooked and pushed up the blinds and looked out. She looked out on the heads on the piazza, the women's faded, worn shawls, the men's shapeless hats, that were all old and shabby. She saw the movements, always menacing, but eloquent in gesture, of heads and shoulders and articulate hands. That was at noon, when the sunlight poured straight down upon the piazza. The wind the dawn had promised was not up yet, and it was a still, brilliant sunshine. Yet it seemed to have no power against the sense of darkness there, of hidden things. She saw Vanini moving about in the crowd, taller than almost any one, talking, with his head thrown back and his face aglow. In every group he joined people fell silent to listen to him. They opened their groups to let him in. They moved after him, and kept close to him, till all the piazza was gathered around him, listening to him. She saw the Sindico in the crowd, and the assessore anziano and the reverendo and all the town's great

people, and they all were listening to Vanini. They were less great than he, to-day. She was proud of him, as if in some way he belonged to her; and yet it was really that never before had she so belonged to him. He was so much more now than the Vanini she had known before. She had known him humble, timid, bowing too low before her; or forgetful of self, forgetful even of humility and timidity, in his great earnestness, commanding her. But here he had nothing to do with her, he was just himself. She had never seen him so apart from her before. The world was his. The piazza was a small, poor square of a world, the people did not much matter, their lives and deaths were of small account; but that day it seemed to Florida that she knew here greater things than the great world ever had taught her.

She heard Chichetta moving about behind her in the room and speaking to the old mother. After a long while Chichetta seemed to be trying to make Pippo eat. The old mother came and stood also at the window with a bowl of soup in one hand and a bit of bread in the other. Chichetta persuaded the Signorina to take a little of the bread and soup, and Florida ate, still standing at the window. The people in the piazza must have been hungry too, and perhaps that helped Vanini in his trying to make them go home to their work and their houses. It took long, but at last it seemed to be quite at his bidding, when the short winter afternoon was halfway through, that men and women turned from the piazza and went back each to his own "business and desire," and the crowd thinned, little by little, until the piazza was empty. Vanini had gone, she had not seen where. She waited on still at Chichetta's. Now she knew it was not because he might want her, but because she wanted him.

The silence of the piazza was an intense relief after the crowd and turbulence; fear wore away a little, and things seemed almost as usual again. Chichetta took up her sewing. The old mother talked of the past; now of vague old evils, now in a long description of a much finer red shawl she had had the year Gian Lossi killed Sicardi at morra,—a much finer one than this to-day. At sunset time still Vanini had not come. Pippo scarcely stirred in his darkening corner and would not speak at all. The old mother talked now of running water. She talked for a long time, vaguely; they scarcely listened to her, she was so vague and wandering at all times. Afterwards Florida remembered: something was to happen to some running water, she mumbled, somewhere.

Night fell early, but still Vanini had not come back. Chichetta lighted two candles and set them on the table. The candlelight, with the glow of the fire from the oven, made the little room beautiful. Pippo's little shadow crouched behind him on the wall, and the old mother nodded where she sat; Chichetta's shadow followed her as she moved about. Florida got up and paced the room, up and down, up and down. The candle flame swung and swayed as she passed it; its light came and went, in and out of the polished surfaces of the coppers on the shelves. The fire glowed dully red in the little stone oven. The room had that peculiarly Italian smell, like the churches, of dust and stone and the ages.

Outside, mistral was up in the piazza. Florida knew how dark it would be out there, scarcely a window lighted, only an oblong of light, drawn as with a pencil, about the caffè door. The darkness, she knew, meant the extreme of poverty this winter, the poverty that could scarcely buy oil and candles. It meant the never-resting trouble of the taxes, and the

never-ceasing quarrels of the caffè; it meant the misery that made evil and set it in motion, that set anger in ignorant, unjust search for an object. It was a darkness and misery that got into men's hearts and made them dark. She imagined Vanini gone with the men into the caffè. The caffè would be closed tight against the mistral. In the unstirred air the light of the oil lamp fixed against the wall would shine clearly on the men's faces, for there would be no smoking to cloud the air. That too meant poverty, evil; the men would never have grown so ugly over comfortable pipes. Only one's breath in the bitter cold would stay white and thick in the air. The shadows of the men, like the shadows here in Chichetta's room, would move grotesque and gigantic upon the walls. Florida knew so well the way of it. When the men gathered together over the strong, bad paese wine, with nothing but hardship to talk over, each one of them piling his wrongs on the heap of all the other's wrongs, the excitement of each one adding to the excitement of the others, then an evil thing came to their faces, out of a depth beyond their own lives, out of their fathers' lives and their fathers' fathers', back through the ages. There would be no going home to comfortable things, soup and the fire and the lamp. What Chichetta had said about their blaming of it all to the castle lady, Florida understood very well. She could see the men there at the caffè table, and in their faces the reason of all this thing. There would be Giacomo, whose baby had been ill ever since the lady petted it, and Antò Moti, father of the Rina who had had misfortune each time she wore the pretty things the lady had given her. There would be a dozen men who had had work all their lives on the castle lands but had been turned off by the superintendent, since the lady came there, because

first the vines had failed and then the olives, and there was no work. There would be old Pascà Michaeli, who had had valuable lands of his own, which, because he had always been too poor to work them, had lain idle while he worked for the castle steward, making scarcely enough to live and pay his taxes, whom now, because of this bad year, the steward had turned off so that he had not been able to pay his taxes, and the tax agent had seized his lands and the steward had bought them for the castle; — Pascà, whose people, as long as any one knew, had owned the land. They had been proud people, and now Pascà, who was an old man, owned no more than did a dog in the streets. It would be he, heavy jawed and heavy browed, who would hold the caffè's mood against Vanini. She knew how Vanini there with them must be going over and over it all, as he had been going over it with them again and again through all this bad winter. The lady had nothing to do with these things, Vanini would be insisting; she and the Signore had rented the castle, but they had nothing to do with the land. The steward managed all that for the Flaviani, far away in Rome. It was the steward who had turned the men out of work. He had done it for the Flaviani. It was the tax agent who had taken Pascà's land. It was the tax agent again who had profited by whatever had been made by the sale over and above the taxes. It was the Flaviani who would gain by the buying of the lands for less than their value.

“But it has all happened since she came,” they would all say, echoing one another. It was proof to them. All the evil had come since she came. The superintendent and the tax agent were taken for granted, dully, almost without anger. Such a loss as Pascà's was always only one more inevitable deadly thing. Pascà, concerning that, would have gone under

silently, in the depths of misfortune, and the others as silently would have watched him go. The Flaviani were far away, no one in the paese ever remembered their having been at the castle. No one thought of them, they were beyond imagination, out of reach of hate. It was the castle lady, here in the midst of them, luxurious before their eyes, a little mysterious, who had become to them type and symbol of things not to be endured. She lived in many rooms and Pascà had no corner to lie in. On the lands that were beautiful about her for the pleasure of her eyes, no one dared to trap a rabbit, if he were starving, or gather a bit of firewood, if he were perishing of cold. What could be answered to people who only said, as they had been saying through the weeks and the months: "No, all the evil has come to us since she came." Even if he could keep them from the evil that was yet so vague among them, it would be only for to-night; the struggle would but begin over again to-morrow. Every success emphasized defeat. He would come home tired and discouraged, even if he had succeeded. And it was that Florida loved him for. After his strength in the piazza it would be his weariness she loved him for. As she waited there in Chichetta's room she went over in her imagination the things she would say to him. She would tell him, as she had never told him before, what he meant to her. Nothing she was going to say seemed to her exaggerated. They were great impersonal things that she would be saying, of him, not to him. She would say them, not to the man who would come to her, there in Chichetta's room, but of one as impersonal to her, or as dreamily, ideally personal, as St. Francis, the Poverello.

Presently Chichetta went out; she could keep quiet no longer. The old mother had fallen asleep where

she sat, her chair drawn near to the oven. Pippo was still huddled on the floor in the corner. Florida put the fiasco and the loaf on the table by the candle and pushed a chair there. She mended the fire. She wanted to be a servant for Vanini.

When he came in, at last, he looked white and tired. He did not speak at all to her. He went and sat down in the chair she had placed for him. The old woman did not wake, but Pippo went to Vanini and stood leaning against his shoulder, and Vanini put his arm around the little boy. Florida stood apart from them.

"My father is dead," said Pippo, after a while; "they thought I did not know it, but I do." Then Vanini took him in his lap and held him, not saying anything, but rocking a little to and fro in the straight chair. Florida, watching, sounded depths of loneliness. She had wanted to say many things to Vanini, but now those things seemed not in the least to signify. Now she only wanted to be petted, just as Pippo was, in the same way, as simply.

After a while Pippo said: "I have no one at all belonging to me. Have you nobody belonging to you, Vanini?"

"No," said Vanini, "I have nobody."

"And I have nowhere to go," said the little boy; "have you, Vanini?"

"No," said Vanini, "I have nowhere to go."

"Vanini," cried Florida, coming to them and standing there, oddly apart from them — she too belonged to no one, nor had she anywhere to go: she wanted to say that to him, but she only said "Vanini," striking sharply into his isolation with the boy, — "Vanini!"

Then at last he seemed to take it in that she was there. He sprang up, putting Pippo from him.

"Signorina, you ought not to be here; it is not a place for you. They are quiet for a moment, but one does not know what they may do, and it is not for you to see such things. Why did you stay?"

She told him: "I thought you might want me."

He came to her, the few steps across the little room. His quick movement made the candlelight flare and flicker and set the shadows all swinging.

"I thought you might want me," she said, again; "I wanted, frightfully, that you should want me."

He stood looking down at her, and she looked up at him, still with visions in her eyes, still seeing him as the follower; poor Vanini, who was looking at her, just at her, as she stood there, not away, any more, to an ideal out of reach. There was a moment of it stranger than she knew.

Very helplessly he looked at her in silence. She went on: "When I came here there was no one, no one, of whom I could think without pain. There was no human thing in all my life. And the sun and the stars were not enough for me. And you came and gave me people. Do you understand? You gave me people, who are real and near and feel one's touch, and respond. You gave me love of people, with love of the sun and the stars. You are to me what no one else has ever been, ever, or ever can be, because you, just when I needed it, showed me the reason for living—" She stopped short, half sobbing and half laughing. "Oh what a tirade! How they'd laugh at me for a fool! But,— " flinging out her hands to him,— "What does it matter, what difference does it make to any one whether or not I am a fool?" She stood with her head held high and looked at him.

He looked at her too, and then away from her, and bent his head, and the silence was a tense, impassable

thing between them. It was a long silence. She did not at all understand it till long afterwards. Then he said: "Signorina, you are very kind to me, as to one you pass by in the road. When you go back to your own world and your own people, please sometimes think of the man you were so kind to. Now you must go away from here. Come, Signorina, I will take you down to the garden house."

XX

FRANZÉ was taken down next morning to Ventimiglia to prison. The whole paese was out to watch him go. The whole paese had been out in the piazza the night through, in spite of the cold and the wind, the ill-lit little square a night-marish confusion of voice and gesture. As soon as it was light the police brought Franzé out from the municipio, where they had been keeping him in the guard room since his arrest. The police, it should be supposed, — and yet there was small certainty, for they themselves were of the people, — had meant to keep the people from knowing at what hour he was to be taken away, but word of it had somehow got about, and the crowd, in the dawn light, stared sullenly at sullen Franzé as he walked between his guards. The wounded man, too ill yet to be moved, was kept in the guard room back of the municipio. It was said that he was dying and that he was not being properly cared for. His wife raged so frenziedly that they had to keep her away from him and finally to take her too under arrest. All day the crowd was threatening in the piazza. No search was made that day for Settinella, still hiding somewhere in the hills. Perhaps the police were afraid to leave the town with its piazza in such a mood, or perhaps, being themselves of the piazza,

they had their own reasons for letting things as much as possible alone.

Vanini, in the piazza and in the caffè, was the one and the only distinct influence. He was utterly of them, these people, who were his people, — a thing which they felt, — and in closest touch with them, quick and definite, sure of understanding; but just because he was all that, he was against them, as even the police were not, for he saw that things perilous for them would somehow, in some form, come of this, should they let loose their madness. In the piazza, moving from this group to that, the center of each the instant he joined it, taken deeply in by its instinctive opening to him, he was indeed the sole influence felt. There was no man among them all but was his friend, scarcely any one for whom he had not done some service, not one who would not have been glad to please him, who was not ready to put trust in him. In the caffè they listened to him, and there were some of them who came even to emphasize what he said with a nod, or a word, or a thump of the fist on the table. And yet, well as he understood them, he was fighting against a thing he did not understand, a thing not to be met outright, or even to be named. Whatever it was, deep down in their hearts, under the excitement of this definite thing that had broken out, something indefinite gave meaning to it all, something which — as one of the people themselves he instinctively knew it — would be made only far worse by any recognition of it. It was a thing that must not even be named in a place like this, in a mood like this of its people. He must strive all in the dark against, — he knew not what, to keep the people from, — he knew not what. And all the while he was horribly afraid, though he had not time to wonder in those days of what it was he was afraid. He knew

only that it was in some way because of the Signorina, and that it had come to him, that night in Chichetta's room, when she had said wild things to him, and he had so terribly well understood how she came to say them. She had given him many beautiful things in his life, but she had given him also, in one moment, fear. In one long silence, then, he had known fear, — fear that his love for her was not after all like the love of those (who can love her) for the Madonna, to lay at her feet like a tinsel heart or a heap of roses; but a very human need and craving for her. He had thought to love the Signorina as one high set in a niche, above reach of all of him but his prayers; he had thought he wanted only, as it were, to pray to her. But in one strange long minute, as he stood before her, he had known that his love for her cared more for the least touch of her hand than for any dream of worship she might give him; and in that moment he knew and understood two fears: one that she might find it out; that his love, laid at her feet, might be a thing she would stumble over; the other, that if he went away — as he would have gone in fear for her — the danger that was abroad might turn upon her, and he be not here to fight against it for her. He knew what harm there might come to her as the friend of the castle lady, and that no one but he could keep that harm from her. Because of the one fear, he dared not stay near her; because of the other he dared not go away. He was glad that the countless things he had to do, in the days that followed the morra trouble, so crowded in between himself and her.

In two days the aid, if indeed it were aid, the Sindico had sent for came from Ventimiglia. Strange faces and better uniforms of the police were seen about in the piazza, strangers — with no right, the

paese silently and savagely felt, there — dispersed the piazza's crowds, broke up every group that formed in the streets, looked darkly on the gathering of the caffè. The woods were searched for Settinella, and he was found, after two more days of it, and taken to the Ventimiglia prison. In the meantime the two murdered men had been buried, and no one, even of their own people, had been allowed to follow them to their graves. In a week the wounded man was well enough to be taken also to prison. His wife was still in custody, not allowed to see him before he went. The piazza and the streets were cleared of the crowd that would have pressed about his going, and he was carried through an emptiness and a silence. Then, for half a dozen more days, strangers kept watch on the piazza, seeing nothing. It was decided in Ventimiglia that the danger was passed. The Ventimiglia bersagliere were withdrawn and the paese took up its work again. The wife of the wounded man was released, and sat all day, every day, on the church steps, and never spoke to any one except in whispers.

XXI

It was weeks before Florida saw the castle lady again. April had come, but it was still cold, with a coldness that bore down from the snow on the mountains, and made the season very late. It was past time already for almond and cherry blossoms; past the time when primroses and narcissus and violets showed themselves in the garden beds; past time when the lizards were wont to sun themselves on the garden walls, and the "strazorlora" to be singing; yet winter held the hills.

One early morning Gianin came limping, breathless,

to the garden house. Madame was very ill, he stammered, and would the Signorina come at once?

Florida gathered what had happened from his excited talk as they hurried up the hill path. The Signore had gone away, that was five days ago, and this morning madame was very ill. She could not breathe. Léonie, the maid, had seen her before like that and knew, but this time she was afraid. They had the doctor, and he too was afraid. He said it was of the heart, and that it was bad, very bad. Gianin wept as he told it.

They hurried up through the olives and the paese. It was one of the days when the wet sky blanketed all things, heavy and chill, and closely wrapped about the world. The castle gardens were sodden and colored desolately. In the castle halls one felt somehow as if trouble were a tangible thing there, a presence abiding there within its very walls. The air was vibrant with sorrow — Florida had always felt it so — the old rooms full of it, saturated with it, as an old violin with all the melodies that have rung its strings. She felt it so more tragically than ever as she ran up the narrow stone stairs and along the passage to the lady's room.

Léonie and Master Gallu, the doctor, turned with relief to her, but the castle lady did not even know that she was there.

There was nothing for her to do. The doctor and the maid together knew how to do all that could be done. The maid seemed to have been through it all many times before, to have all the needed things that the doctor, in that little place, had not, and to know how to use them with a confidence that he, poor Master Cock, quite lacked. Both he and the maid were frightened to the point of wanting just some one from outside, just some one different from themselves,

to turn to, but there was nothing Florida could do to help them. It was the desperate struggle of such minutes as may be the last. Nothing mattered. The struggle was desperate beyond heed of anything. There was no part for Florida in it. She sat on the floor at the foot of the bed, her face hidden in her hands, that she might not see. The steps of the maid and of the doctor — carelessly loud, it was beyond matter of that — came and went, close to her as she sat on the floor. She heard their voices, speaking rarely, — they did not trouble to lower them, for the lady could not hear. The maid let something fall noisily. The doctor called aloud to a servant outside in the hall. One of the servants coming and going kept slamming the door. Every sound was dreadful with the tense significance of sounds in a sick room. Florida hid her face in her hands and the sounds came to her muffled, yet each slightest one had its meaning, as, not seeing, she imagined it. It was terribly long. At last, of a sudden, there was a new note in the voice of the doctor, asking for something, quickly, and the maid, answering him, whispered. They moved on tiptoe after that, and kept their voices low, and there was a hush, one felt, like a poise of wings, over the room.

When it was over one could not have believed it had been so desperate. The castle lady spoke to Léonie.

"It's better, is n't it?" she said; and to the doctor: "I've been like this often before, Léonie can tell you. It is always the same, and it always passes."

After a while she called Florida, and when the girl moved quickly to where she could see her, she smiled, with a coming of the dimples, and said: "I thought you were there, I don't know why." She

even laughed at Florida's white face. "Did you really think I could die?" she said. "Why, Léonie might have told you. We've gone through it over and over again, have n't we, Léonie? And all to no purpose. Why were they so silly as to send for you? Oh, you poor little thing, why did they send for you to frighten you?"

Her hands kept moving on the counterpane and there was a terrible restlessness in her eyes. She would have Florida come close and bend down that she might see her face. "I can't see very well when I'm like this; it gets all dim. How white you are! Poor little thing." She lifted one hand to touch Florida's cheek as the girl bent over her. "I'm glad you're frightened; I want some one to be frightened about me. Gerrard does n't know. I've always kept him from knowing. How many years is it, Léonie? Three years? Truly? So long? And I've had much worse times than this, have n't I, Léonie? And he has never known. Flori, you won't go away?"

"Oh, — no, no, no!"

Léonie pushed a chair over for her, close to the bed, and she sat holding Monna Lia's two hands and trying to keep them quiet. The doctor and the maid moved about the room. The castle lady tossed and tossed from side to side, restless, dreadfully, in the big, curtained bed. After a while the doctor gave her something that quieted her, and she lay still with her eyes closed. After yet a while the doctor went out of the room. Florida followed him out from it to the corridor.

He told her what she knew already, that it was over, quite, for this time, but that of its ever really being over there was not any hope; it would come again, and come again, and the fighting of it off for a time only meant its greater violence afterwards —

and soon afterwards, the doctor said, buttoning his cape under his chin. Blessed Saints, how ill the woman was! She must have been ill very long too; why had n't she taken care? A little while ago care would have made such a difference. Figure to oneself taking sleeping drugs, as the maid said she did, night after night, when one had a heart like that! And tiring oneself out, as she had, never quiet, the maid said that too, and every one knew it, how she wore herself out walking the floor whole nights through. And out in the hills, when the Signore had been there, those long climbs such as he, the doctor, had to take when he visited distant cabins; climbs that half killed him, strong as an ox. He himself had met her, last week, away back in the mountains with the Signore. He'd seen, even then, death in her face. And there were women who had to work! Blessed Saints! And she, who need not, so to kill herself! It was n't, moreover, as if she had n't known.

Florida had walked down the passage with the doctor. They came to the top of the stairs, and he stood a step or two down looking up at her. Poor castle lady, she knew well, — he had found that out from the maid too. She had seen doctors, and they had told her just what he said now. He told Florida the name of the heart trouble she had. She could never be well again; the great doctors, out in the world, said that; it was too late for that, but she might live, they'd told her, a time yet, if she took care. If she were only happy enough to take a little care. "There is the whole thing, Signorina," said Master Cock. "If she were happy she'd want to live, and she'd take care. But you see —" A shrug of his shoulders dismissed it. "However, there is no danger for just now. And I must go now to the child of Tonio Baldero, that is very ill. I'll

come back in an hour at longest. There is only now to keep her quiet."

Florida went back to the room where Monna Lia, in the great bed, moved again unceasingly, tossed and flung her arms out, and threw herself about, and started up, and fell back without strength, only, after an exhausted moment, to toss and toss unrestingly again.

"Monna Lia, my Madonna, won't you listen to me? Give me your two hands, so, and listen. If *only* you'd keep quiet, you'd be well."

"But I must not be well, — oh don't you see? How much better it would be if I could die!"

"Madonna, don't, I can't endure it, — I do love you so!"

"Poor little thing, how sad that you should! And yet I'm glad you do. Come nearer."

Florida knelt by the bed, and tried to hold quiet the poor wandering hands. The sick woman talked.

"The little doctor told you that it would n't be such ages after all, did n't he?" she said. "Poor little thing, you need n't answer, for I know. I'm glad you care, it makes a great difference somehow, only you must n't care bitterly. You see it's ever so much better like this. I want you to know. If I lived to go on now, what would happen? But do you know —" It was the saddest thing Florida was ever to hear any one say. "Do you know," said the castle lady, "there are times when I'd have it go on at all the cost, at the cost of all his life?"

"My dear, my dear, —" There seemed to be nothing else then that Florida could say. "Please be still, Monna Lia."

When the castle lady did, at last, be still, Florida managed somehow to get a note scrawled to Vanini and send Gianin off with it to find him wherever he

might be in the paese. That was a little before noon. Vanini must manage it. There was no one else.

He must go to Ventimiglia for her and telegraph Illsboro — who had gone to Cannes, she got his address there from Léonie — to come back by the first train. He could get a train that night, surely, allowing well for the time it would take Vanini to get to Ventimiglia and send off the telegram; — and coming in the night up the valley, could be at the castle early next morning. Vanini must wait in Ventimiglia to come back with him and explain to him as they came — though Florida did not know how he could explain, how they could possibly come to understand one another and this thing between them, the two men who had never met before and were so utterly different.

She was outside the door scarcely a minute with the note, explaining to Gianin, but when she came back the castle lady was trying to sit up among the pillows. "I thought you had gone away; don't go away," she cried.

"Of course I won't," answered Florida.

"He went away," said the castle lady. "Florida, he's gone away."

It seemed impossible to quiet her. She went on to talk of all manner of unimportant things. She wanted the windows open, she wanted the windows shut; she wanted to get up and dress and go out on the terrace; she wanted to have the curtains drawn so that it might be quite dark where she lay in bed and she could see nothing. She worried because Florida was there, but please would n't she stay? She thought the bed was sinking down through the floor, and begged Florida not to let it. She kept saying: "You poor little thing, you oughtn't to be here, but don't go."

The doctor came back and stayed all day, but

there was terribly little he could do. No drug he dared give her had, any more, any effect. It was the longest day Florida had ever lived through. All day the castle lady was just one of the very ill people who are all alike, whose hands move ceaselessly and vaguely, and whose eyes have a curiously childish look in them, and who talk incessantly of anything. She kept asking what time it was, and Florida would go to the mantel and look at the clock and tell her: "It's almost half past one," or "it's just going to strike three." "Is that all? How long it is, how long it is!" To Florida too it seemed that the hours would never pass. She found herself growing more and more nervous about Illsboro's coming. Suppose he did not come. Or suppose he came and only made things worse. It was dreadful to sit there quietly, and wait, and wait, not knowing.

Somehow the hours wore themselves away. Monna Lia still kept asking the time, and then would laugh because it made no difference what time it was. "You mean it's only four o'clock? Was there ever such a day? Why does it seem so long? We aren't waiting for anything, there's nothing to wait for. There never any more will be anything to wait for. To-morrow will be just as long, and all the days. Florida, go look and see if it is n't really later than four o'clock."

At last there came sunset. The great purple clouds lifted themselves a little from a space all of live gold. Florida, where she sat by the bed, could see the west from the window. There was a little new moon, a white scythe in the gold field of the sunset. She could see the tops of the laurel trees on the lawn, and the olive tops down the hillside, touched with gold, and the five dark cypress trees standing up against the lighted sky, tall and black, as if higher

than the hill crests, that were snowy, beyond them. Presently the castle lady slept for a while. And then at night she could not sleep any more.

"You must let me stay with you to-night," said Florida; "you can't send me away to-night."

"No," said the sick woman; "I *can't* send you away to-night." She was propped up almost erect, so that she could breathe more easily, among many cushions. She watched Florida, as she moved about the room, with eyes that seemed afraid to lose sight of her. "I'm glad you're here," she said; "it's horrible, — the night, — with thoughts and memories. I could not have borne the night. To-morrow I shall send you away, but to-night I shall not think of that, I shall only be glad you are here."

"Please do be glad," said Florida.

She had taken her place in it all as if she belonged there. The preparation of the room for the night, the arranging of everything was hers, quite naturally, to attend to. The doctor would go away to come back early in the morning. Several of the servants were to be up all night in case there should be need to send for him. The maid would rest on the sofa in the next room.

When the doctor had gone, and the maid had arranged windows and fire and lamp and had gone too, the castle lady said to Florida: "Would you sit where I can see you, when I look to make sure you're there?"

Florida came to the big chair close to the foot of the bed and curled herself up in it. The castle lady sighed comfortably, and lay still with closed eyes, breathing quietly. Her face was very white between the two black braids of her hair. The soft waves of her hair were loose a little, and curled about her forehead and about her ears and on her neck. Her lashes

lay very long and dark on her white cheeks. The dimple came, very pathetically, whenever she spoke or tried to smile. Her face had grown very haggard and worn. The scar necklace about her throat showed painfully. She lay still so long that the girl hoped she was sleeping, but after a while she spoke: "How near death comes in the night. Even when he's not going to take one, he comes close and looks at one. I have felt him close by, like that, many times when I was n't even ill; and I'm so afraid! I, who have no right to be afraid of death,—"

"Don't talk like that," Florida begged her.

"Come nearer," said the castle lady. "Sit there close to me. I'm so afraid. I ought to want to die, but I don't. I don't think many people in the world are as unhappy as I am, but I don't want to die. Is n't it funny? When I was well I should have been less afraid. I think I might have killed myself then. Who is it says that suicide is the expression of the extreme, the supreme, fullness of life? It is, you know. When one's well one can do things,—even that. When one's ill it all fails, strength for that with all the rest of it. And one lets them save one. Is n't it funny?"

"Hush, hush, dear, don't talk till you are better and can think of happier things," cried Florida. "Monna Lia, I so want you to be well."

"Do you, you queer little thing? It would be better not, you know. He can't take up his life while I live. You see he can't take me into that life. All good turns from him if I am with him, passes by on the other side. If I'm with him all his life is lost to him. And he won't leave me. He can't, and that's the tragedy of it. He is n't the sort of man who could ever feel, ever, that I was — just to be left, paid off."

"Oh don't, don't!"

"Poor little Flori, do I hurt you?"

"Awfully."

"I'm sorry. Are you looking at me with those big eyes of yours? I seem to feel them. I don't want to open my eyes, but I can't help feeling. With my eyes shut I see your eyes, that are clear and pure and full of dreams, and that know no condemnation, only pity and chivalrous defense. They are the eyes of the boy who keeps vigil by the shield, not his yet, through all the night before the king comes to touch his shoulder with the sword. I like your being so tall, I always wanted to be tall. When I was a child I used to think that if I were tall I shouldn't be afraid of things. And even now it seems to me that if only I were tall I shouldn't be such a coward. I used to be so afraid of life, and now I'm afraid of death. Do you know, last night I thought I could kill myself? I went to get a thing to take, and as I was standing there, I thought of a dreadful great dark room my governess used to lock me up in when I was a little girl. When she pushed me into the big dark room, I used to think that it was n't a room at all, but just space, that she was pushing me over the edge of the world. It seemed as if all beyond the world were like that, a great dark space one was pushed off into. I thought last night that, — that some one I used to be dreadfully afraid of was there, was driving me into that dark space. He, — that person I used to be so terribly afraid of, — seemed to be with me, really touching me. Poor little Florida! What things I am saying to you! Why should I say such things to you? I never do to Gerrard. When he is with me I forget all those things. And he does not know. I am glad he does not know how horrible it was. Sometimes he reads

to me aloud of things in books, in papers, and he passes over them not thinking, and I could cry out: 'I have lived through just such things as that.' But he does not know. When I was in the midst of it, — of all that, — and he seemed the only clean, sane thing in the world, he did not know. He knew it was bad, but he did not know it was as bad as *that*. And always, when he is with me, I can forget. Only when he goes away it comes back. Florida, I think if it had been good weather, he really would n't have gone, he would n't have minded it here so much. If we could have been out of doors! Or if I could have taken walks with him. I tried to. I can't remember if ever we went far. It always seemed far to me, awfully, and I can only remember the trying to go on. But we had to be in the house so much. I could n't talk well, or be amusing. You see he does n't care to read, or anything. I tried to talk as I used to talk. I used always to amuse him. But you see he's been with real people, who have real things to talk about. And I'm just a ghost. I knew what jolly things he's been doing with his own real people. But he did n't seem to like talking to me of those things, and that made me feel more than ever a ghost. He has been with young, pretty women. How hideous I must look! Poor little thing, how can you bear to look at me? Give me the mirror, — no, I don't want it. It does n't make any difference. You see it's all over. No, no, I don't mean that I'm going to die, I can't die — " She broke off suddenly. "You see we have n't, he and I, any of the little things as people have who are married, the little, ordinary, every day things. When people are married, there are so many little things that can be made to keep them together. They can do all the little things together. They can have the same friends and go

to the same places, and say to one another: 'Yesterday So-and-so told me that,' and 'To-morrow let's go to the So-and-so's.' If he were bored here, she could go with him to Cannes, and the young, pretty women he knew, she could know too. She'd have lots of things to talk of with him, just the little things one talks over. She could walk with him in streets where they'd meet his friends, and his friends would stop and talk to them. And she would say to him: 'Do you know, I think Madame Telle et Telle is rather losing her looks,' and 'Is that poor thing really the beautiful Madame Chose?'"

The castle lady — close to the edge, with all the shadows of the great dark space before her — laughed, the dimples coming and going.

"Oh, I used to dream beautiful things," she said; "even the last time I saw you, before he came back, I was dreaming beautiful things. There was a beautiful ideal I dreamed of, of unending love, and the fullness of peace in that love, its sufficiency and its perfect safety. But I came to dream only of being able to walk with him in the streets, of having his friends speak to me, and of being able to say little, cattish things about the other women. When you go back to your husband, Flori, laugh at all the pretty women, and have dresses prettier than theirs, and go about with them, everywhere."

She was holding Florida's hand while she talked, and her own moved feverishly.

"I want to tell you things to-night. To-morrow, when I'm better, I shan't be able to talk in the same way. Let me tell you now, while I can."

"Don't, Madonna, please don't."

"But I must — I have such reason. I have such reason for wanting you to understand. You won't

know, now, but you will know some day, the reason why I must, why I simply must, for your own sake, make you understand the thing I've done. I've taken all his life, all his youth and opportunity. I've taken it as women — oh, not half so bad as I am — take pay in money. I thought I was better than those women, but I was worse. They took money, but I took life, — all those best years of his. What have they been these years for him? Wandering years, here, there, anywhere, fleeing, hiding with his mistress — ”

“ Monna Lia, Monna Lia! — ”

“ His mistress, because of whom he could not live in his own land, or look in the faces of his own people, or take any place of his own in the whole world. For ten years. His mistress, whose love he has not paid for with money, only with his life. And, Florida, now he knows what she has cost him.”

“ Dear, dear, don't talk so — ”

“ Oh, no, I'm glad I've talked. It seems as if I had never talked before to any one. There's one thing I want to ask you, Florida, — you are worried about me, are n't you? You are afraid of death for me, are n't you? But I am afraid of life for you. I worry about you dreadfully. I'm a coward for you, because I know. I've been a coward about life and I'm a coward about death. But you, — you tall little thing, you can be brave. It is not too late for you to be brave.”

“ Dear, I don't understand — ”

“ You would n't, now. Some day I'll tell you. And will you promise me, little thing, that, when that day comes, you'll listen to me? Promise me that, and I'll not talk any more.”

“ Oh yes, dear, yes.”

After that she lay still most of the night, not

sleeping, but quiet, speaking only to say, sometimes: "Poor little thing, how tired you must be!"

Toward dawn she fell asleep. Florida still sat watching; those we watch sleeping so, are strangely — so strangely — our own.

XXII

ALWAYS afterwards, even when they came to be very far and dim, those hours she watched by the sleep of the woman she had helped keep back from dying, whose hand even in sleep groped for the touch of hers, were to her, remembering, poignantly dear. Intense as had been the struggle with death, the nearness of the hours after, when the castle lady talked to her and they were so close together, — so close in the shadow of its wings, — those hours of watching and of silence were yet more intense, deeper of significance and somehow the more precious to be remembered; so utterly her own was the woman she watched sleeping, her own as no one else in all her life had been, with no one else but her to turn to. Her little child, that was dead, had been her own like that, cared for by no one else; but — there was the dreadful thing of it — she herself had not been her own to give of herself to the child. She had not been her own, but the *man's she loved*, all his, — her thoughts, her time, all and all. She had left the baby, sobbing for her, to follow him, where he did n't in the least care whether or not she came, — her baby, that had died while she, turned from its need of her, had been watching the man she loved, and another woman, — who did n't even matter. The bitterness of it had got into her soul, was with her always. Now it made her, watching in the night, the more passionately conscious of this entire possession.

Illsboro would come back, — she knew he would, — and he would be kind, and he would be all this woman's reason to live. But it never could be he who had fought with death here, who understood, and strove for, and defended. He would come, but she, who knew as he never could know, had brought him back. It would be *she*, always now, who had the *right* to care, because she best knew how to care, and cared most. Once he had sent her away, but he could not send her away again. She felt her freedom savagely. He had sent her away because of the man she loved. And, little as she had known it at the time, it was because of the man she loved that she had gone. Now, — so much farther that time of hers was passed, — the man she loved seemed to her to have no more to do with her, and she was all her own, with all she had to give quite hers to give, and no hindrance.

She sat in the shaded lamplight with her hands clasped round her knees, and felt things as one feels things in the strange little hours before dawn. How deep the shadows were in the farthest spaces of the room, and how still, how very still the world was! There was a sound in it that she noticed only after a while, so a part it was of the silence. It was the sound of loosened waters, of all the hill's little waters set free from the high snows to torrent down the hill-sides. It was the sound that first, in this land, meant spring; and it had a torment of meaning for her. It meant an end of things, perhaps, the ending of this winter, this strange winter, set quite alone, aside from all the rest of her life. And it meant a beginning of things, a need of taking up, of decision, and of going on, — in what road she could not see. Several times she got up and went to stand by the open window, and something of spring, some taste of it, came

in on the wet air to her. From time to time Léonie came in to mind the fire, and Master Cock to question her in a whisper, but their coming seemed to make her no less alone with the lady.

There was a clock that ticked. After a while dawn showed white about the oblong of the east window, penciled finely; it came in through the closed blinds and made a white ladder on the room's dusk. Gianin brought her a cup of coffee. He came tiptoeing to the door and opened it without a sound, and brought the little tray to her. He piled new logs on the fire, without a sound, and cornered it with a screen, that its leaping red and gold might not wake the lady. He opened the blinds, and Florida drank her coffee with the new day stepping softly in the room. It had all the very special significance of each new day's beginning in a sick-room. It meant things that filled her heart with pity. And the hardest of all those things was that one could n't lay life down, except for a little dark while, but with the first light must take it up again, and go on. She sat in the strangeness of the dawn, waiting.

The lady was yet asleep when there came a rapid step in the hall, and Florida was up and out of the door in time to stop Illsboro.

"You can't, — not like that, —" she said, barring his way.

It was dark in the passage. Gianin was with Illsboro, holding a light for him. It showed his face, very different from the face of the man who had sent Florida away those weeks before, haggard and white, and set with all the seals of grief. She felt a sudden pity for him; what must n't he have suffered that he should come to look like that? And, without meaning to be, she was kind.

"Lord Illsboro, please listen to me. She's been

awfully ill. You can't do anything suddenly, like that. And she's sleeping a little. Come, let me give you breakfast, and I'll tell you."

"Will she die?" he asked in a queer, hard voice. She had a sudden, quite sure sense then of things that had been happening to him, dreadful and difficult beyond her knowledge, but that had to do with the outside world, so far from this, in the weeks he had been away. "Will she die?" he asked again.

"Not now, — if one can only make her care to live, try to live. If only she wanted to live she might for a little time, you see. That's why I sent for you. Nobody can make her care to live but you. And you must. Forgive me. I know how strange of me it seems to you, but let me tell you, — and first, please come have breakfast."

He seemed scarcely able to talk, even to question her. She felt it about him that he had been through some great suffering in the days he had been away, and that that other suffering, whatever it might be, had left him dull to this, confused and helpless. She made him eat something while she talked, standing by the dining-room table — neither of them thought of sitting down — there in the dawn twilight.

"She has known for a long time that her heart was bad, but she has n't cared," Florida went on. "It seems they told her, before she came here, that she would have to take great care; and she has n't in the least. Oh, don't you see? The trying to keep up with you, don't you see how it has killed her? You must know. When you were here, — think how it was. And when you went away — Oh, don't you know? Don't you know how it is when one can't sleep for the thoughts, and takes sleeping drugs to give one escape from the thoughts? And the days, endlessly

long, with no escape from thoughts, walking the rooms, up and down, with the thoughts upon one? And when it came to it that there was no reason for going on at all —” She was sorry for him there, standing before her, not speaking. “You, you *care* that she should not die for just unhappiness?” she finished.

He did not need to answer; looking at her, it was all there, plain, for all the confusion of suffering that was yet about him.

“What can I do?” he said.

She answered him: “Pretend all the things that would make her happy; that everything is as she would have it, even if it’s not like that. It does n’t matter how hard it is, just pretend, and pretend.”

“How can I?” he besought her.

“Pretend you wanted to come back. Don’t let her know I sent for you. Pretend you’re glad to be here, and that you want to stay, always. Pretend you care for nothing else but to be with her. It won’t be long. She is so ill. As long as there’s any use you must just pretend.”

All the while, as she talked, Florida more and more felt that he had been going through tragic things utterly apart from this since she had seen him last; but whatever those things were, he must put them away. Poor, big, beautiful Illsboro, for whom the outside world held so much, had made of his life this thing that the hills must hide, that the hills must fall down and cover, and there must be a putting away of all else. She had quick sight of him, among his people, in his place, as happy and as young as the little Alicia. It was strange that she should have thought of Alicia just then, and of how they had played games. How joyously he’d made them play! And here was this. They stood together, beyond, as

it were, all time and space, and their people's reach, in conditions of nobody's imagining.

She filled his coffee cup again, and turned from him and went to the window, and stood tapping on the glass, looking out and not seeing anything, though the dawn was out there, radiant. She came back after a little and said again: "It's the only thing you can do. You must just try."

"Oh, if I can —" he said.

"It won't be for long," she told him; "she does n't want you to know that. You must n't let her see you know it. You must keep everything commonplace, and just be kind." Had he looked less confused and tormented, she would have said hard things to him, she would have put it very plainly and said: "Think how she has given you all, and now she's dying, and, whatever's become of your love, there must be enough left of it for you to be kind." He gave her no more the impression that he had given her before of a great strong thing to turn to; rather he seemed to be some one who needed her, who turned to her in helplessness, to be told what to do.

"You won't go away?" he said, even as the lady had said it to her. "You'll stay, won't you? I can't seem to think. It's all so ghastly. Oh, you don't know how ghastly it is! There is so much more than you know of it. I can't explain. It's worse than anything I can tell you. And you see, she must n't know that. It's goin' to be awful, pretendin'. I don't know if I can; you'll have to help me do it."

Florida gave him her hand, and went to the lady's room to tell her.

She was a little frightened about it, but she began.

"Gerrard Illsboro's come back," she said; "did you know he was coming so soon? He came all the

way up in the night, and it could n't have been easy. I saw that he had some coffee, and he's gone to his rooms now. I said I'd let him know when you would see him."

The castle lady did n't move or speak. For a minute Florida thought she had not understood. She said it over again. "He came all the way in the night." But the lady only said: "Why did he come?" She looked out of unlighted eyes at Florida and said: "Why did he come?"

"He must just have wanted to. Shall I tell him you'll see him?" Florida said, as if it was a matter of course.

"Yes," said the lady, in a voice without any life in it. And then she caught at Florida's dress as the girl would have left the room. "Don't go away, stay with me, be here when he comes, please, oh please! Send Léonie for him, I can't stand things without you!"

And she said to Illsboro, when he came, big and kind, to her: "Why did you come?" She lay quite still, her fingers clinging to the folds of Florida's skirt, and looked at him, and her eyes searched his face so tensely that Florida was sorry for him.

He answered, trying very hard to pretend, as Florida had told him to: "Oh, just because I wanted to come. Cannes was awfully borin'. Felt as if I'd been away a month of Sundays. Everything's awfully borin' without you. Are you better, Mary?"

"Only tired," she said. "Gerrard, did you really want to come back?"

"Rather, yes," he said.

"Was there no one in Cannes?" she asked.

"No one."

"But you'll be going back again?"

"Rather not."

He had been standing by the bed and he turned from it and went over to the fire. "Good old blaze," he said looking down into it. "One got pretty well frozen coming up the hill. Queer chap that, that met me at — that I met and walked up with. Vanini, his name is. I liked him immensely. Mean to see quite a lot of him. Somebody to do things with. I say, Mary, you must get well fast; you will, won't you? You'll take care of yourself and get quite well?" He was not looking at her when he said it but still into the fire. There was a dreadful silence for a minute. Then he came back to stand close by her. "Mary," he said; "Mary —" He cared very much, and that was in his voice. But it was not to him she turned. Her hand still clung to Florida's dress and her eyes searched Florida's.

"Flori, you won't go away this time," she said; "whatever they may say, you'll stay, won't you? Oh, if you don't —" The pitiful thing was very plain in her eyes. She was too ill to hide it. It was that she was afraid of being alone with Illsboro. She was too ill to realize what she said. "I can't keep up, you know, Florida. And he'll be so bored. It will be all — like that — again." The terrible little tragedy of it was all there. "I can't go down to luncheon. And I can't talk. What will he do all the afternoon? He so hates to be alone and to be dull. Oh, don't go away!"

The silence again was very dreadful. Florida broke it.

"Gerrard," she said, somehow managing to laugh, "I think you will have to say something polite to me." She turned to him and held out her hand.

"You're a ripper," he said; "by jove, you're a ripper!" He held back one instant and then went straight on, as she had told him to, pretending. "I

say, I'm frightfully glad you 're here, d' y' see; we can all of us do simply rippin' things together, can't we?"

XXIII

It was a strange enough little world in which these four people, Florida and the castle lady, Vanini and Lord Illsboro, were thus come together, but it was very beautiful in certain ways. They had indeed rather desperate need that it should be beautiful, for surely nowhere in the world were there together four people living more utterly in to-day. There was no to-morrow for the castle lady, and Florida, curiously alone and adrift, had no to-morrow she dared think of; nor had Vanini, the vagabond, or Illsboro; perhaps he, least of them all.

Mid April brought spring at last to the paese. "Si sente la Prima," the people said, as though it were the first, the principio, of all things, a new beginning of a world, a new life springing forth.

"Si sente la Prima," said Maria Domenica, flinging open the shutters of the Signorina's window to each new morning, as if each time it were a wonder quite new and scarcely to be realized.

"Come si sente la Prima!" said Bacè, when the Signorina came out to breakfast in the garden, looking up from his touch on earth and roots and stems that new life had softened and colored and set pulsing and thrilling. And of the people she met on her way every morning up to the castle, some one was sure to say it. "Bon giorno, Scignurina. Quanto si sente la Prima!"

One felt spring through all the hills, where the first almond blossoms were scattered, — light, fragile things that the wind might have carried and tossed

so, frail and exquisitely new, through the strong old gray of the olives. The valley was misted through with green gold softness where the chestnut trees were budding. The sap, mounting, glowed through each stem and twig of the rosebushes in the gardens. Everywhere the grass was full of pale, short-stemmed violets and primroses, celandine and anemone and hepatica. The lovely white flowers of the leek stood tall about the roots of the olives. All the waters of the hills were set free, countless tiny streams tumbled down the terraces in cascades of gold and amber. The hills sang with their voices. The walls that upheld the terraces grew soft and bright with moss and fern and maidenhair. The lichen turned to living green on the boles of the chestnut trees.

Si sente la Prima — one felt spring in the new azure of the sky that domed near and soft over the world. One felt spring in the paese streets; in some new quality in the gold of sunlight, striking suddenly, as one turned a corner, across an angle of velvet blackness; in the dance of the sun motes against the depth of shadow in a doorway; in the shadows too, some deeper blueness in the bridges the earthquake arches threw across the streets, and in the campanile's shadow, that lay all the morning, shortening slowly, across the square of the piazza.

One "felt spring" in the children's voices, as they played *mosca cieca* about the church and the fountain; in the calls of the men at *pallone*, down behind the *caffè*; in the chattering of the women at the fountain, and their calls across the streets from window to window. The swallows too were back, darting, swooping across the piazza in the sunsets, their little acute cries sounding against the sound of the town's living. Patches of green glowed on the brown roofs, where some wild seed thing had been drifted months

before and had caught hold. The goldfish "felt the spring" and came to the top of the vasche, little gold flames glinting through depths framed in by roses. The birds "felt the spring"; the finch and thrush and blackcap greeted it with their voices. All the waters of the gardens sang as they went their little stone-bound ways. The frogs sang from the vasche. The gardens of the castle and of the gray house were fringed with mimosa; the terraces under Florida's windows deepened pink and white and pale yellow with the bloom of stock. There came wallflowers and white and yellow starry daisies and daffodils and her dear narcissus and carnations, frisia and white candy-tuft, anemones, crimson and white and purple, velvet pansies and all the roses.

She woke each morning, rapturously, to "feel the spring." How it came into her room, all the spring, to her, — sunshiny, misty, dewy, blue and gold and opal morning, glow of the hills where sunshine touched live bud and twig and stem, music of many little loosened waters, sweetness of far spaces, nearby sweetness of overturned earth in the garden beds, of opening, night-wet flowers, of burning brushwood, perhaps, where Bacè was at work already, down on the bottom terrace.

Perhaps she would work half the day with Bacè in the garden, down on her knees in the moist, sun-warmed earth, her hands in touch with it, her face close to it. How one felt the spring throb and stir in it! She caught of the throb and stir, and felt as she had never felt before, her every sense quickened, throbbing, stirring too, all life there at her fingertips.

Bacè sang the hill songs as he worked in the garden, — his vague, sweet old songs, always sad. Vanini had told her of them, how strangely they were the songs of the Tuscan peasants, brought to these

Ligurian hills by the trading of times long ago, when Genoa the Superb dealt with Pisa, and spread through Liguria what Pisa got from Tuscany.

“Vorrei morire della morte picinina,
Morta la sera e viva la mattina.
Vorrei morire, e non vorrei la morte.
Vorrei vedere chi mi piange più forte.
Vorrei morire e sta sulle finestre,
Vorrei vedere chi mi cuce la veste, —”

“Why are all the songs so sad, Bacè?” asked Florida one day.

“Who knows, Signorina?”

Maria Domenica, coming up the path, stopped by them, balancing the big copper water jar on her head. She had a faded yellow handkerchief folded three cornerwise on her shoulders and crossed on her breast, and a scarlet cloth wound round in a pad as a rest for the copper water jar on her gray hair. The scarlet was reflected in the polished copper. She steadied the jar with both hands, for it was very heavy.

“When one is happy, it is always sad, Signorina; and who knows why?”

There was no special reason why Florida should remember that moment, but she always did, and it was to come back often to her in aftertimes and places. They were down on the lower terrace by the well. Maria Domenica stood there, so, in the path. Bacè was on his knees, loosening the earth about the roots of a little pear tree that wafted its first frail white bloom against the darkness of the cypresses. Florida was sitting on the stone rim of the strange old well. She had been leaning far over to look down into the well's darknesses. Afterwards it was to seem to her strange that then she had not known what meaning the well had in that season's strangeness. In

the vasca, close by the well, lived the goldfish, who kept the pest of mosquitoes away from the garden; and there lived the lizards, who slept with their gold-ringed eyes wide open, and the little green rane, who sang with the cicale and the larks and the nightingales. But nothing lived in the well. Roses grew deep about the vasca, but they drew back from the well, and left its shadows alone in it. It was the very well the Romans must have used, perhaps even a people older than the Romans, with its "cicogna," as the people called it, — the so simple arrangement of pilaster and horizontal pole, bucket at one end and stone weight at the other. The well was bottomlessly deep, nobody knew how deep, and it was full of strange lights and shadows and influences, — such influences as linger, one never knows why, in certain places and about certain things. A thick white mist rose in the nights from the well, and in this mist, it always seemed to Florida, were influences not to be reasoned against or to be withstood. Always as a child there had been for her some malia in the old well. She had felt it when, as a child playing in the garden, she had either avoided its corner by the cypresses, or been curiously drawn there, kept for too long times by it, bending too far over its rim to gaze down into the depths of it. This time, that she was for no special reason always to remember, she found herself shivering a little as she sat on the rim of the well while Bacè went on singing:

"Vorrei morire, e stare sulla scala,
Vorrei vedere chi mi porta la barra."

She came away from the well out into the sunshine by the white cloud of the little pear tree.

"All beauty is so sad, Signorina," said Maria Domenica, standing in the path.

Perhaps it was just that sadness which made those days so beautiful.

Florida spent most of the days at the castle. There was less need now than there had been of her in the paese. The town opened its doors and windows, and its babies tumbled about the piazza, half-naked and quite happy; its sick people grew better and crept out to the sunshine; its old people remembered youth as they sat nodding in the doorways; its sons and daughters strolled two by two, hand in hand, through the hill paths and the olives. The sunlight crowded even into the little deep streets and the holes of houses, found walls that were black with the smoke of winters' fires and gave gold to them, dried the steaming damp corners, and drew out to its gold the dogs and chickens and people, old and young. Rina Moti took her baby, carrying him clumsily, up to the piazza, and sat on the church steps with him in her arms, and laughed when he laughed at the pigeons splashing in the overflow of the fountain. Toinetta stood, proud, to watch her fragile little white son playing with the other babies, and would hold him over the fountain rim that he might dabble his little transparent hands in the shining water. Marietta waited by the fountain for the Signorina to pass on the way to the castle, with hands full of wild hill flowers for her. All this, with the hills and the sky and the springtime, and the worship Vanini surrounded her with, was as a radiance about her going to the castle.

For weeks after Gerrard's return the castle lady was too ill to leave her room. Florida had to take care of her, and of Gerrard and of the little things, the little times, that made up the whole of it. She must n't let him notice that the papers were four days late; she must see that Gianin cooked things an Englishman could eat. She must manage that this man she

came to be very fond of, and utterly sorry for, who never laughed any more except in the lady's room, where he pretended, whose eyes were so confused and anxious and helpless, was not left too much alone with those things that she felt to be behind these bad and sad enough things here. She must take care of his time and his thoughts; must make him, as far as she could, understand, and above all must make him pretend, and keep on pretending.

And he did pretend, as she had told him to, wonderfully. She watched him and came to love him for it. He pretended he was glad to be back; he pretended he had no thought outside the circle of the hills; that there was no outside world calling to him; that his love was to him all it had been, and his life complete in it. And the castle lady was happy, and grew beautiful again with the beauty of happiness.

Florida had never seen anything so beautiful as her smile. One wanted all the beauty of springtime to give terms to it, it was such a lighting and a blossoming. When she smiled at Florida the something sad that was in the beauty of her smile, as Maria Domenica had said there was in all beauty, was as vivid as though she said, "Poor little thing." When she smiled at Illsboro, the smile was only radiant, as if she knew no wrong or fear or unhappiness.

Florida, at the castle, certainly had come into the opportunity of doing everything she most cared for. She must watch that the lady was n't tired, must talk when the lady could n't talk, amuse the man — who tried so hard not to need amusement and yet who did so need it — as they sat together through long times, all three of them. She must talk when Illsboro lounged his long length in the big chair in the room of the four windows, that the lady might lie quiet and yet not fear his going away. She must be down on

the terrace when he came out there after dinner to smoke and hated to be alone. She must smoke trecentesimi with him, and chatter, and keep him from thinking of things she tried not to guess at. Surely it was a way of things stranger than anything their world would have thought of.

Gianin's little lemon and orange trees blossomed in their pots about the well of the castle courtyard, and violets came blue to the grass there. The moss on the stones of the well were green and deep as velvet. The grape-vines over the pergola uncurled their coral-tinted leaves. All the shrubs and flowers of the neglected gardens gloried in neglect. What a riot and revel there was of leaf and bud and blossom! She must tell of it all to the lady, make the most of every little lovely detail, give to each white narcissus petal's unfolding, each white cloud's passing over, the importance of things treasured up to be recounted in a sick-room. And to Gerrard too she must make small things matter. She often stopped to wonder how she did it. She often laughed, and yet it touched her, to hear him tell to the castle lady, as if it were his own discovery, some little happening of the day that she herself had brought to his notice and taught him the value of.

They fell together into that close, dependent comradeship of people from whom death shuts the world out, so that nothing of it matters; and inside the circle was a world of little happenings to the least of which must be given every possible importance. In the presence of the one great thing, in the wing's shadow, as they were, every little thing mattered. Little things made the days up. Florida was apologetic if it was not a good dinner. They talked about the risotto; he wished she had n't to be indoors so much this lovely weather. She hoped he'd remember

those letters for the post; and did n't he think they'd better keep the hall fires going yet a while? The cold came on so suddenly.

Florida and Vanini were less often alone together, but their friendship had taken on, it seemed to her, a new and exquisite quality, nevertheless. She felt that he was something to her that no man like Illsboro, no man of Illsboro's world and her own, could ever be. And she felt that he felt it, and was glad he did. She and Illsboro talked in their world's language, which he could scarcely understand, of their world's things that he had no part in; but it was to him she turned in the real world's silences of sun and starlight. All the friends that she and Illsboro had in common were less of a bond between them than some little beggar child of the paese between her and Vanini. In all her easy chatter with Illsboro, she said less than she said in one look to him, Vanini, when they saw the new moon through the olives, or when somebody thanked them for bread. She felt his sympathy, and hers for him, intensely, and she felt it more and more the fonder she came to be of Illsboro.

She came in fact to be very fond of Illsboro, he tried so hard. He spent long hours in the lady's room, quieting his big voice and movements, doing little services very gently, so thoughtful and so quick to be kind that one could n't help but love him. Florida appreciated all of it, and did love him, but always as if, in all things that mattered more than the little customs of their world, he were infinitely far away from her. Sometimes in those days she would have given anything she had to be able to word to him a little, however little, of what it all meant to her. Something she had caught perhaps from the South in her life in it gave her a need of expression he did not understand any more than Jack did. It

seemed to her that in talking to him of anything she cared about, she flung herself against the blank wall of his not understanding. Things Vanini understood from a look, or a quick word, or a gesture, Illsboro was not even conscious of.

Now Vanini was much at the castle. He and the Englishman were building up an odd friendship of contrasts. Vanini would come to dine, ill-clothed, ill-fed, shabby and haggard, quick of word and gesture, unused to manners, but with a distinction that came from his very indifference to thought of them, to sit across the table from the Englishman in the perfect dress, with that inimitable air of possessing all fine things by birthright. It was the most beautiful thing about Illsboro, that look he had of having right to all fine things. And it was the most beautiful thing about Vanini that not any look of possessing things, but a look of having no care or need of possessions, gave him a fineness even as of race. The Englishman was a great noble, with all a great noble's ease and courtesy. Every detail of him was right, without his ever having considered it. He knew cold and hunger, as he had met them when he had chosen, often enough, to rough it somewhere in the way of nobleman's sport. He was stronger in almost every way than Vanini; he could have endured more and perhaps judged better; he could have done things Vanini did, — worked, sacrificed himself, met hardship, — and yet it would not have been the same. He lacked something Vanini had. It was something hard to name, but it made, so it seemed to the Signorina sitting there between them, all the difference. The Italian was a vagabond, without a collar, hungry, and yet forgetting to eat for talking and listening. He would pocket the sweets for his paese babies and for Chichetta's old mother, and was apt to ask if his dinner

might please be set aside for him to carry away to somebody with more need than he had of it. One minute he would be listening in all humility to the Englishman's talk with the Signorina, silent, too timid to take part, content to follow, and the next minute he would be pouring out upon them both, because perhaps their talk had led to subjects he was their master in, a wealth of knowledge and of eloquence that silenced them in their turn. Poor Vanini, little as he was of their world, had of it something that kept him from ever being wholly of his own, that set him at war with both worlds, and made for disaster. The tragedy that had begun when one day a certain noble happened to notice the beauty of a girl singing in a Naples street, had not ended when she died somewhere under an archway with a baby in her arms, and the dust of the tramontana closing her eyes. One of the great wrongs of the world and one of its great dangers was plain there in the talk of the English gentleman and the vagabond who was a noble's son. Perhaps Illsboro would be telling of the people on his estates, of what he tried to do for them, from even so far away, his voice eager and earnest as he talked of it. And perhaps Vanini would break in upon his very kindness with some outcry from the side he gave his kindness to. "It's not kindness; your kindness won't help them, it's not kindness they want of you, it's their right, their right to take their own, that you, for all your kindness, hold back from them." The two of them would talk half the night through on the terrace. And they spent much of their days together too. They would pace the garden paths for hours, or tramp far off through the hills. Illsboro would go down of a morning to hunt the paese for Vanini, or wait for him at the door of some cabin, delighted if the vagabond had time for him.

The days Florida spent alone with the castle lady, when the two men were off for their long walks in the hills, were specially dear and to be remembered. In those days the castle lady could be all the sweet, beautiful things she had not been able to be to the girl before. Then she had been unhappy and had had nothing to give; now she was happy and gave without measure. She seemed to forget all the yesterdays, and never to look ahead, and to love the day for itself, losing nothing of what was beautiful in it, and making it very beautiful. She was not well enough yet to leave her room. Everything of life seemed to be gathered into that room, as if the spring world came in at its windows, and just within its walls there was enough.

Should they have tea by the window, or by the fire? And which were lovelier, the narcissus or the daffodils, in the old copper bowl? And what should they read? Was n't it warm enough to leave the windows wide open, so that all the garden could come into the room? Or would n't it be nice to have a fire? The little things of every day followed in sweet sequence, and Léonie's care of this, and Gianin's care of that, meant much in it all. Illsboro's adorable, clumsy telling, when he came home, of what he'd been doing through the day, meant much too. He would come in upon them, at the end of their long, still, dreamed-through days, kindly — oh, so kindly — to pretend.

And Florida pretended, — that it could all go on like this forever, and that they could be happy, not just "making believe" at happiness over the edge of pain. The lady would be well, and Illsboro would forget all things but his love of her; and Vanini, the Stranger, would never wander away; and she, Florida, would come to belong here, in this life, so absolutely

that no word from, no thought of the life she had left behind could matter to her in this.

Spring was unfolding its great blossom slowly, not opening all in a night, as the Northern spring does. The violets on the terraces had grown longer-stemmed and heavier-headed, and a darker purple. The terraces were swaying in taller white narcissus. There came strange spirit-like orchids to all damp places. The gardens were in festival. The white and purple iris stood tall, in stately ranks; the anemones were in their richest velvet, scarlet and crimson and purple and mauve and cream; the daffodils spread patches of sun under the olives. The Banksia roses covered every wall, and the rose fortunée opened wide hearts full of gold to the sun's gold. The other roses were all cut, and the stems and leaves and buds of the second growth were red as coral. Wonderful gold green leaf had come to the chestnuts. The fig trees stood gray and distorted, naked and strange, in all the wealth of color. All the birds were back and singing, — the lark and the thrush and the finch and the black-cap and the nightingale. The chaffinch built his nest low in the trees. The Signorina had spent hours telling the paese boys that they must not rob him. The goldfinch built high out of harm's way, and the blackcap hid his nest in the holes in the trunks of the olives. White butterflies came to the garden with the bees, and at night came white moths and fireflies, the owl and the civetta, that cries like a cat, and bats that winged low duskily across the white patches of candytuft. The little river of the valley lay like a wide blue ribbon through the peach blossoms. All the fruit trees — pear and cherry and peach and the almond — drifted wafts of color and fragrance against old, dim yellow walls and brown, worn roofs, and against the new greens and softer

grays of the hills. In all the paths one met troops of sheep and goats being brought up from the valleys to the hill pastures. The world seemed very young.

One day, as Florida and Vanini were coming down to the castle from a walk in the hills, they met a flock of goats in the path, and the Signorina would stop and buy from the goatherd a little very tired kid that lagged behind the rest, and make Vanini carry it home for her across his shoulders.

"You should have a brown habit, Vanini, and a cord about your waist, and go barefoot, with a staff in your hand, and the kid like that on your shoulders," she said.

They went on to the castle, laughing about it, Vanini carrying the kid with easy care.

It was like that the castle lady saw Vanini for the first time since the day the people had thrown stones at her before Mimo's cabin; the kid's four little black legs held under his chin, and its delightful little black face cuddled comfortably against his neck. Florida looked on, amused, because it did not in the least occur to Vanini that there was anything to be amused at. The castle lady was down for the first time in her chaise longue on the terrace with Illsboro. Florida ran up the steps to her ahead of Vanini and flung all their morning's gathering of almond blossoms into her lap. The castle lady looked at Vanini over the pink-and-white branches of almond.

When last he had seen her, she had been a desolate creature, — as desolate for all her luxury as any woman of the paese. Now it was different. He had not realized the difference until that moment. In his pity for her when she was unhappy, he had forgotten the wrong of the thing she had done. In all the time he had been with Illsboro he had scarcely

thought of it. Now he saw her, happy, with Illsboro back and kind, and the love of the Signorina offered to her, and he drew himself up unconsciously.

"Vanini," the Signorina was saying, sharply, into his silence; "Vanini."

Illsboro had not noticed.

Vanini came over to the chaise longue. The castle lady did not hold out her hand. She looked up at him and said: "Oh, don't you see, it's for such a little while?"

Florida heard her, and turned away quickly from the picture they made there, the castle lady, and Vanini, who condemned, standing there with the kid across his shoulders.

XXIV

THE Signorina and Illsboro were coming home from a long walk in the hills the day he told her about Alicia. The heavy blue of noon lay motionless and soundless upon the hills, and filled the valleys, and made a wonderful soft blending together of all the world and all the sky.

They had stopped high up on a terrace under the shade of the olives, and had been sitting there for a while, not talking of anything. The campanile bells, down far below, broke suddenly into ringing, peal upon peal, and the sound came to them, all softened and mellowed, rising through the heavy air as though through water, that could have been, she fancied, no bluer than the air was, and no more still, and scarcely denser. She had, for the minutes they sat there, the sense she had long ago had as a child, in that special autumn sunset, — of drowning, of going under, in color and sound and fragrance. She sat in the grass, with her knees drawn up and her arms clasped round

them; and he sat by her, digging his stick into the soft, moist earth; and, after a while of it, quite suddenly, he began to tell her. He was desperate and he had to tell her. And it was dreadful. There had been things that morning in the papers. Such things, — hints about the poor little girl and that Marcento. Oh, the lie it was! Poor little soul! Her mother had done it; unbelievable, but he knew. Of course he loved her, Alicia. He had not known that one could love like that. He never had meant to. He had fought, oh, how he had fought, against it. If only he'd never gone home. It was home, and that little girl, together. Florida must not misunderstand. He squared his big shoulders against any one who misunderstood. This, all this, had been beautiful and good, whatever they might be fools enough, detestable enough, to say of it. Mary, — no one was like her, no one so good. He worshiped her. But that other love was different, that love for the little child who did n't at all know the world, for all she was so hideously of it, who in the midst of it was so unspotted from it. He loved her differently. Oh, he knew how hideous it was. He never had meant to tell her. Only her mother, — that woman. He'd simply had to. Of course he had n't asked her anything. It had been horrible. But after what her mother had said, telling her had seemed the only possible thing to do. It had seemed that *that*, however it hurt him, would make it easier for her, would spare her mortification. And he thought she loved him. He knew she did, poor little soul!

And that mother of hers — !

He could n't trust himself, for minutes, to speak.

How she'd thrown them together! And he had wanted it, frightfully. And hated it, frightfully. And it had all been damnable. One day when she —

the mother — had made it, — had shown that she wanted it, — heavens, he did n't know why, he, the good for nothing he was, and she, Alicia, an angel, — had shown that she meant to, — that she wanted it, — awfully plainly, so plainly that everybody else there, and he himself, and poor little Alicia could n't help seeing, — he 'd felt just too frightfully, he just had n't been able to stand it. And then he 'd told her, — Alicia. He had told her partly because he thought if she knew he loved her, she would n't mind so much, and be so frightfully mortified, poor little thing. And partly because he just simply could n't help telling her. He did love her so frightfully.

And that was all, because he 'd had to go away. There 'd been nothing else to do about it. That had been at Cannes the first time. There was a brute of an Italian — Prince or something — called Marcento — there. He had known perfectly well how it would be. As soon as he 'd gone the mother had begun it. He could hear her saying that he 'd gone off, that everybody was talking and laughing, and that the only thing for her — the poor little soul — to do to save herself, and she so exquisite, was to — ugh! — that the only way out of it was Marcento. He 'd known she 'd say that, and he 'd been half mad, and he 'd gone back to Cannes. He had n't seen Alicia, or even tried to see her, except when she 'd driven past. He 'd just stayed near. And then came Florida's telegram. But to-day in the papers he 'd seen things about Alicia and Marcento.

He said, in a way that made Florida turn and look at him: "I say, do you ever hear from Alicia?"

"Yes, often."

"Do you write to her? She's frightfully fond of you."

"Sometimes. I'm fond of her, too."

"Could n't you write to her now, the next post, and say something? Is n't there something you can say?"

"Gerrard, it's not that Marcento of Maria Spacci's, — and all that? The Marcento who got into such a row last year at Monte Carlo? Who's supposed to have gambled away all what's her name's jewels?"

"Yes," he answered her, grimly.

"Oh, Gerrard!"

"I thought she might have written you something," he said.

"Nothing about that. Only all the letters have been so unhappy. She knows, you say, that you — care about her?"

"I never meant to let her know," he said, "but I did. Look here, Flori, you know, I hate to say this, but her mother wanted it for some extraordinary reason, and kept making things horrible. And one day it had been before a lot of people, and afterwards the poor child cried. She was just so confused and troubled and mortified and ashamed, — imagine little Alicia ashamed, — and then I told her."

"You told her that you loved her?"

"Yes."

"And she told you she loved you?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"Then I told her I had to go away."

"That was the first time, when you stopped at Cannes with them on your way out here?"

"Yes. And I could n't stand it. I went back that time, you know. And you telegraphed."

"And what happened then?"

"Nothing. I did not let her know I was there; I

did n't even see her. It was only to be in the place where she was. Then you telegraphed."

"And her mother?"

"Can't you guess the things she'd say? How she'd talk about me when I'd gone? And what she'd say about poor little Alicia herself? And how she'd make Marcento seem the only thing?"

"Hideous."

"I say, Flori, is n't there something you could write her, just about, — oh, what could you write to her, Flori? Think, Flori."

"I could write to her," she said slowly, "about the other things. The things that are so much better, that one can make oneself content with, if only one gets away from all that, from those people, and the way they live and what they say. It's what I've done here. I've got away from them, and I've found other things. And I've been happy. I'll write her that, Gerrard, — about how beautiful places help, and people who need one, and how, when one gets away — But, Gerrard, she can't get away."

She remembered the night when she and Alicia had talked in her room at Evelyn's, and Alicia had promised her something, — not to fill up the spaces with ugly things; but this was, if it were as it seemed, a terribly ugly thing. She wondered if she could say to Alicia — she, who, Alicia knew, had only hurt herself in loving: "Don't marry without love. Suffer anything except the thing life would be without love." She had loved too much, and Alicia knew it, for she'd told her. And yet she could say to Alicia: "Even if the niche is empty, don't set up false gods in it." She remembered how she'd said to Alicia: "I wish I could get you away out of it all."

"She told me once," said Illsboro, "that you were

the only person who had ever helped her. She needs help, awfully."

"I'm afraid there is n't any help," said Florida.

She stood up, and so did Illsboro, and they went on down the hill.

XXV

So it came about that Florida wrote a very odd letter to Alicia. It was not a long letter, but it meant a great deal. One who read it with any sort of understanding must have felt how much there was underlining the short little few words of it. It was full of evidence of the capacity for suffering which made Florida herself what she was, the cruel capacity for suffering which makes life a thing too great almost to be borne. Just in that was the pitifulness of it, that little things should be so great, that a look or a word could matter so, one's life so hurt one while yet one scorned it, the world be so much with one while yet one's soul knew wildernesses. The whole torment of decision, and the peace — at least it seemed a peace — of choice made at last, definitely, and of quiet after, when one had really stepped over, crossed the line, was in that letter. And just in telling to Alicia of the other things that there are to turn to, when all things of *that* world fail, she filled her letter with a dangerous sense of freedom, a longing for the world of to-day's sun and to-night's stars, and for people who were real and near. It was a letter that might well give to sensitive, tormented, puzzled little Alicia a longing to break away, to throw herself into some dim quest of things perhaps unattainable. It might well have made the little Alicia long rather awfully for some true reason of life, that it were better not even to think of. One might have imagined Alicia

reading that letter in the halls of a big bright hotel, where people in smart dress passed and repassed, and the orchestra played quite the smartest things from the boulevards. It was a letter that meant so much to Florida, writing it, that after she 'd written it, she shut her mind against all thought of it, and would not remember, — till need came that she should.

XXVI

As spring came on, every new day now, when Florida waked to it, gave to her a quite new world, more beautiful each morning than ever it had been before, a miracle worked every night.

Sunrise after sunrise had for her its meaning of Easter and resurrection, of infinite promise. Morning after morning she would be at her windows to see the ever new giving of hope to the world. The sun would not yet be up, and everything would be without color or shadow. There would be no sound of breeze or bird or paese bell, no stir of life anywhere. Everything waited. Dim, shadowy hills lay unfolded, away and away, opening the dim, shadowy valleys to distances dim and shadowy, the castle and the paese, high on the crest of the hill, against the east, one great shadow together. Rising dim out of the shadowy olives and shadowed dark, the castle towers and the campanile, with the mass of roofs, were marked distinct upon the flawless sky. Then behind the crown-shaped silhouette of town and castle, the sky would change ineffably with the mounting of the dawn. All in an accumulating rapture of glow and color, the sky would fill and flood and intensify with rose gold, and against the rose gold, castle and town would be turned to purple. The sense of wait-

ing grew more intense, and then, in an instant, the great round gold sun would begin to mount between the castle towers, and day would fill the world like a music.

And every day it was the very wonder it must have been on that first morning of the world when God said: "Let there be Light and there was Light." Always it seemed as if the sun waked things, all in a moment, — the birds of the garden, the breeze from the dawn, the paese bells ringing in the dawn not the less beautifully because the clash and clamor of human things was in their voicing. And how the nightingales sang in those exquisite mornings, and the larks and thrushes and finches! The sparrows and blackcaps joined them, — there came a cock-crow from the paese, and the bark of a dog. Color came into things, the terraces under Florida's windows showed their color in broad steps, — five broad steps, — all radiant with spring. Sound and color and fragrance met the light. Light multiplied to lights; there were a myriad lights, uncounted lights. It was all as wonderful to Florida in those first moments of every morning, as if each day were a new miracle, a revelation, never to be foretold, a happiness un-failing. From striving and living, from passion, pain and anger, one could turn always to the mood of these things which did not fail.

It seemed to her, in such minutes, that she was safe in this happiness, that it was her own forever, — this, the happiness she always and always could have, that no one, not even the one she loved best, could ever rob her of; but the memory of this "one she loved best," suddenly, when she felt herself safest from thought of him, would come to her — like a wave of pain she went down under. She clutched at anything then, any hardness or bitterness, to save her-

self from drowning. Sometimes the thought of her little dead baby that always cried for her, and that she was always leaving to go where Jack went, though Jack did n't care, ever, whether or not she came, served to make her hard, so that she did not feel. But again sometimes the thought of the child was only an added pain, because she knew, as she had always known, but never felt quite so cruelly as in this time of complete separation, this time of influences so utterly different, that her love for the child had been nothing, weighed against her love for the man. The little child, whose crying she had so rarely been there to comfort, she had loved because she loved the man. Her love for the man had kept her from the child, had turned all her love for the child to bitterness, and yet, in the subtle irony of things, her love for the child, and the memory of it, bound her to the man all the more closely. She knew, in those best moments, when she was happiest and farthest from him, that she did love him still, that she loved him to the exclusion of all else, not only the man she had made for herself of him, in her dreaming of him, but the man just as he was. And she knew it was only in desperate pain of loss that she turned to such things as the sunrise, away from her starved love of the man she had found her king of dreams to be. She turned to the sunrise, to the impersonal things that are everybody's, to be had by everybody, always.

Came human life, simple and true and closely a part of it, into the vastness of the sunrise. A plume of smoke, white and purple, lifted above one of the few paese houses that could boast a chimney, was caught in the breeze and swayed and swung against the morning, telling of the fire lighted, the breakfast getting ready, the children clamoring, the father off to work, the mother with thought for fire and babies,

the school-books and the lunch-box, the hatchet's work in the olives. In such dawns Florida at her window would tell over to herself the list of things that were her own; — her love of all outdoors, of the winter's lamp and the fire, the summer's waste and bounty; dawn and noon and twilight and the dark; spring and summer and all the miracles that the seasons work, to our great wonder; the wilderness and the crowd in the piazza; the hope each night that the morrow would be beautiful, a faith in something, even if one did not quite know what, and, greatest of all, a charity to give and to receive. She told herself, as she stood at the window, that at twenty-five it could not be possible she had come to the end of things, that the end of hoping for the one thing she could not have, of striving for it, could have ended so her taking of all other things, and of any love else.

Any love else, — what need love have to do with it, she asked herself, in those mornings. What need love have to do with it, when there were days to dawn for her, and hills for her to wander over, and books great men had written for her, and a fire of pine cones and olive wood, were it cold, glowing for her, and were it hot as these days were coming to be, a shaded window, open to the garden, that she might read them by. She told herself always as she turned from the window that she would put everything else out of her life except the beauty of each minute.

Vanini's love surrounded her like a light, like a fragrance. It was as the warmth of the sun, and as a cool shade to rest in, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. She still did not realize it, what it was, but she was glad in it. She loved his love of her, and life as he lived it, as he was showing her

how to live it. She loved all the wealth they shared of ideals and dreams and far desires.

Sometimes they wandered off for whole days in the hills together, perhaps with little Pippo, or with the reverendo or Marietta or Master Cock, or perhaps alone, never knowing where they would go, asking for a bit of bread or farinata at any cabin they passed when they were hungry, resting whenever they found a place specially beautiful, making friends in lonely cabins and in the little crowded hill towns, finding always things to do for people, and always much that people did for them. They went from one to another of the little hill towns making a friend of the schoolmaster or the priest or the Sindaco, hunting up the old picturesque records, disordered and forgotten, that are the only means of getting at the country's history. Together they studied out the history of the castle and Gianin's ghosts, and had fine stories to tell in the evenings on the castle terrace, when Florida sat close to Monna Lia, loving to be near her, and the two men smoked under the heliotrope.

Sometimes Illsboro would want a tramp through the hills, and then Vanini would go with him, and Florida stayed behind with the castle lady. Those, after all, were the times she loved the best. There were long, azure days when nothing happened but the changes of light and shadow, and the coming and going of fragrances.

The lady had grown so much better now that she could walk about the garden, and she talked of herself as if she were not ill at all, yet never spoke of anything beyond to-morrow. Never, indeed, had four people such need to take fully of to-day.

Two or three times, Illsboro and Vanini, in their long walks, were away all night, and then Florida

stayed at the castle. There was one such night she always specially remembered.

It was the night of the day in late April when she got a letter from Jack. He wrote just of the usual things, — that it had been an awfully gay winter in town, with crowds of balls and things; that now everybody was away for Lent, and town was boring. He'd go South for a bit, the Martins and Dorothy were going to Aiken, and he'd be over by the end of May, and she'd better meet him in Paris. Everybody would be there then. He thought he'd take over the polo ponies.

It was a moonlight night, and she and the lady were out on the terrace.

For a long time neither of them had spoken.

The lady had not even moved, as she sat where the shadow of the heliotrope fell across the moonlight. Florida could see of her only a slim, lovely white length flung back among the cushions. Florida sat on the broad stone balustrade of the terrace, turning sideways a little so that she might see the lady, and yet look away over the garden to where the fountain dripped in the shadow and the frogs from the vasche sang with the nightingales, over the fall of the hillside and the paese roofs and the olive crests to the world full of moonlight.

"What are you thinking of?" asked the lady at the end of a long silence.

"I was making believe," answered Florida, slowly, and went on with it. The letter from Jack had given start to her "make believe." It was strange, and yet it was n't strange at all, as things were with her, that a letter from the man she loved and could not stop loving, should set her making believe such a thing as this she made believe about another man. She answered the lady, telling it slowly.

"I made believe I was not I, but a boy, who could throw away everything, and never need so much as glance back, and could go away with Vanini, Heaven knows where, wandering the world, lingering in beautiful places, following the wind, living every minute as if it were for all time. "And do you know," she said, leaning forward, her hands still clasped around her knees, "that *is* the way Vanini lives? And I love his life. He's a vagabond and a poet and a saint, and I love him. Madonna Mia, if only I were a boy!"

She had often talked of Vanini, because he had a great part in her days. She had laughed about him. She showed the castle lady how he bowed his shockingly reverent bow, mimicked the expression of his face when she teased him, made much mock of him and yet loved to put into words what beautiful things she felt for him, — such things as might have been the love of some little novice of the Holy Clairs for the Poverello.

To-night, as she paused in talking, the lady said: "Little wild thing, you'll not forget the promise that you made me?"

"To listen when a day came? Of course I'll listen. Why do you say that now?"

"Because you need so badly to be taken care of. I'm afraid of things for you."

"What sort of things?" asked the girl.

"Oh, many things! I'm afraid you — you lost child, that you will travel too far, and not see where you are going. You mustn't go where they can't find you. One day, you know, they will realize, and want you terribly, and come to find you. And then you mustn't have gone so far that there's no going back."

"Monna Lia, I don't see what you mean."

"I don't quite myself know," the lady said, "only that it is dangerous to be where you are, in a mood where nothing matters and nobody counts. There's some dreadful mistake about it, and some day the mistake will be put right. You'll find then that all the time somebody did count, did matter. And nothing must happen to make it, when you find that out, too late."

The girl sprang up and stood in the track of the lamplight, which was all upon her face and showed a wildness and a longing in it. She stood so for an instant, and then stretched her hands out with a gesture, as if to tear her happiness from any fate that held it back. "I want to be happy," she said; "I must be, I have a right to be happy, I will, I *will* be happy!" Then she laughed, turning away again, and said: "I am gone rather mad, I think, with 'feeling the spring.'"

"Florida," said the castle lady, out of the shadow, "come close and talk to me. Won't you talk to me, and tell me what it is that makes you take life like this? Do let me tell you things, Florida, for I know. When you say like that, 'I *will* be happy,' you prepare yourself for infinite unhappiness."

Her voice was always expressive of things difficult to define. It was full of sympathy, the voice of one who had felt intensely; it was tired with too deep feeling; it was the voice of one who understood all things, and so was very sad. There was something in it, for all its restraint, suggesting that self-control had been acquired hardly; something of appeal in it, as from one who had great need. Florida went to her quickly, standing beside her in the fragrant shadow. Monna Lia lifted herself up among the cushions and made place for the girl at the foot of her chaise longue.

"Sit down," she said, "close to me. I want to talk to you of several things. And please talk to me, too, that I may be less unhappy about you."

"You're unhappy about me? Why? Castle lady, I will not have you be unhappy about me." She sat down on the chaise longue at the lady's feet, and leaned toward her in the dark. "Don't be unhappy about me, madonna; I can't bear that. Dear, I do love you so."

"Oh," said the castle lady, "how plainly you show me the thing I've done! *How* I see the thing that I've done!" She leaned back among the cushions helplessly, and went on speaking with a pain in her voice that made it heavy and dull. "I have stained things, stained things, for any one who loves me, as if I'd touched things and blackened them. Because you love me, you see things stained, so that what I've done seems to you no blacker than the rest of it. It's all so stained that you don't mark sin."

There was no excitement in her voice; it was as if she had gone over it all often and often.

"My touch stains," she said. "Give me your hand. You see, I do the very thing I talk against. But I want to feel you there while I tell you certain things. It is easier to talk when one touches, is n't it? I thought, when I let you come back to me, that time weeks ago, that I could perhaps help you in what is so strange a time of your life. I thought I could be of use that would counteract the harm. But it was not true. No good can come out of a wrong, you see. I've been another thing for you to tell yourself a story about. And the story has sunk deep, deep, like a black stain into your life. And it's spreading over your life. The world you try to disown is right; the women who used to be my friends, and

then would n't look at me as they passed, — or *did* look, — oh, *how* they'd look! — they were right. And your husband — ”

“ Don't,” begged Florida; “ don't talk of him.”

But the lady went on:

“ You've made me out of a hundred stories; you've told yourself my life like a story. And because of that story, and the woman your fancy has made of me, you see life differently and all wrongly. You think that one's life is of one's own arranging, and it is not. There is only to go on, and on, where one is placed, and do what one must do. You've broken away from all your life, and you stand on the edge of the world demanding happiness, — oh, from what? What do you mean, Florida? Tell me what you mean. When I see you as you are to-night, it seems as if I could not bear it. Cannot I help you? Tell me. I can understand so well when I hold your hand like this, and feel what you feel, as I touch you.”

“ I want the fullness of life,” the girl answered her; “ no one ever gave to me in full. I'm starved. They gave me half loaves, my father, my mother, Evelyn. And then my husband. I would rather have had nothing at all. Maria Domenica loved me always, but it was different. It only made me feel the other lack. My baby loved me. And I could only give to him the half loaf. Monna Lia, Monna Lia, night after night I'd leave him crying for me and go out to dinner or to a dance. I could n't let Jack go without me. How often I've sat, stupid, among gay people, watching Jack, the very gayest of them, and hearing my baby crying for me. I gave him a little half loaf, and he died; I think he died of starvation, Monna Lia. But I don't seem to die. And, Monna Lia, now I don't want to. I want to live, and live, and receive.”

She stopped, and again there was a long silence.

The fragrance of the garden hung in the motionless air. The garden was full of soft little night voices, and the sound of running water. Fireflies glowed against the oleanders and the myrtle. White moths flitted over to tall white lilies. The cypress trees stood tall like watch-towers above the olives and orange and lemon trees, dark against the moonlit distance. The nightingale and the frogs, the little green rane, were singing their hearts out to the moon.

"It is all so beautiful," said Florida, with a sob in her throat. "I worship it. I worship it. Why can't one be happy? Happiness is one's birthright." She lifted the lady's hand to her lips, and kissed it, and held it against her cheek as she talked on. "And you are so wonderfully a part of all the beauty. You are kind and generous, as other people are not, and good, as they are not. Oh, I am all the world better for loving you!"

The lady's slow gesture brushed all that hopelessly aside, her fragile white hand moving like a moth in the shadow.

"Florida, once I said, as you said just now, 'I will be happy.' I had suffered horribly, horribly. It seemed to me that there was no suffering I had not borne, and that I could not, absolutely could not, bear any more. I said, 'I will be happy,' and I took my life in my two hands, as you want to take your life, and I made of it —" She stopped. "Talk to me; talk of anything, quickly, Florida."

Florida caught the first light thought that came to her.

"One almost fancies that one hears the sea to-night, as when one holds a sea-shell to one's ear. It is like a murmur beyond all the little voices of the garden. And the nightingale:

'My heart aches and a drowsy numbness holds my sense,
As, though of hemlock I had drunk . . .

Castle lady, I can see such lovely little framed pictures between the columns of the balustrade. What am I talking about? Dear, I can't go on talking, and your hands tremble so."

"Talk to me, Florida."

"Then I'll tell you about my day," said Florida. "It has been such a nice day. What do you think I did this morning, when I came back from finding narcissus under the olives? As I came down past the school the maestra called to me. You know that little plump maestra with the curls? She wanted me to help her with her babies because they were in a great panic. The Board of Health had sent up from Ventimiglia to vaccinate all the school, and the babies were so frightened that she could not manage them at all. Poor little animals, they did n't see why they should be hurt. And, do you know, they thought it was all right when I was there, because I'd given one little girl medicine that had done her good, and because another had heard her mother tell things, and somebody else had one story and somebody else another. And they would n't any of them be touched unless I held them. I've promised them all to go and see them in their houses; and the mothers won't mind my coming, Monna Lia. Do you know in this winter here they've got to know me so well that nobody minds my coming? I can go to any one of the paese houses, and they're glad, truly glad, to see me. That makes me so happy. It's another of the things. I had lunch with Chichetta, and then I spent the whole afternoon with Vanini —"

"Florida, about Vanini —"

"Out in the olive woods —"

"Florida, I must speak to you of Vanini," said the lady.

"At sunset the mountains were translucent; one saw the sun go down behind them, saw it through them, as if they were made of amethyst."

The lady sat up straight among the cushions and put her hands on the girl's shoulders.

"What are you doing to Vanini?" she demanded.

"At sunset the sky was all one great, still, pure lake of gold —"

"Flori, you must listen to me."

"I'll listen."

"Vanini worships you."

"I know he does, in a way. I love the way."

"The *way*," said the lady after her.

"You see," said Florida, bitterly, "I have the great misfortune to love my husband."

"Try and tell me what it is about Vanini," said the lady.

"That, if he'd let me, I'd stay with him all my life. I'd go with him wherever he went, through anything. I'd like to own *nothing*, with him, except just the whole world's beauty and wideness, and the touch of man's life close upon us, and our dreams. Perhaps one day I shall say to him the most beautiful words I know, that I think are better than all the new things people say about loving: 'Whither thou goest I will go, and thy gods shall be my gods.'"

The whole day's thinking over Jack's letter had brought her to just that. She stopped, and began again as the lady waited:

"Monna Lia, I can't go back, I cannot, to that world that you would have me go back to. I could n't go back. I hate that world. I hate all its standards of right and wrong and all its false values and proportions. I hate its view point, over other people's

shoulders, and I hate its following, every one of its people after the other. If I could stay here, and gather narcissus, and take care of sick babies, and see the sky through the olives, and smell garlic in the piazza, and know life and death and real things, — if only I could stay here. Or if, there in that other world, Jack cared to have me, — if he'd come back to me, thinking of me, from other people, if after a dance he cared about the drive home with me, — why, then I'd love that life. He could make me love it, by just caring to have me with him in it. And he does n't care."

She stood up, as she stopped speaking, shaking herself as if to free herself from something. The lady's hands held her.

"Listen, I must talk to you. I must tell you things to-night, while I can."

"You must n't tell me to go back, for I won't, and I won't! I would go with Vanini. I'd make him let me, just so that it would be too late."

She dragged her hands away from the lady's as though to escape even from her. But the lady drew her closer, drew her down to the seat again, and held her there.

"Florida, you must listen, because the thing that I am going to say to you it hurts me to say, frightfully — and yet I must say those things, because I love you so."

She let go of Florida's hands, and flung one arm across her face as though to hide it even in the shadow.

Florida waited, silenced. She thought of that time when she had talked to Alicia, telling her things it hurt to tell.

The sounds of the night in the garden made the stillness seem somehow more intense.

After a little the lady went on, speaking in a monotonous way, as if indeed the things she said hurt her beyond expression, even of pain.

"You know the things every one knows of my life with Gramondin — but — oh, the things that no one knew!" She moved her head from side to side on her cushions, still with her arm across her eyes. "I was seventeen when I married him. In a year I wondered if there was any horror I had not known. After ten years like that, there came Gerrard. I said, 'I will be happy,' as you said it to-night, and I took my life, and made it this —"

She kept moving her head on the cushions in a wounded sort of way that was dreadful.

"I must tell you what I have made of it, because if you know, if you can possibly know, the horror it is that one makes of life if one does what I did with it, the knowledge might keep you from demanding, as I demanded, happiness."

She stopped, and Florida stood tensely waiting.

"To demand happiness, at any cost, means always, always, at dreadful cost to some one. It's taking the bread and starving some one. I took my happiness so, — and, you see. You'd take, and what would you give? What would you give Vanini? You couldn't give him more than the half loaf. And he'd starve. He'd starve slowly, dying a little every day. One can't take happiness like that without killing something. I know. Florida, I know. The thing one's got to do in one's life is just to go on in it, as it is given one, not demanding. What would it mean to Vanini if you, demanding what you think happiness for yourself, took your life and his life, and made the thing you talk of? You'd starve him as you've been starved. Florida — you *can't*."

Florida turned sharply, and walked away to quite

the far end of the terrace. After a while she came back and sat down again at the foot of the chaise longue. And Monna Lia began to talk about the festa they were planning at Easter for the school babies.

XXVII

ON Palm Sunday Florida went to Mass. The church was crowded. It was the blessing and burning of branches of olives, of which the ashes would be used to mark the cross on the foreheads next year's Ash Wednesday. The crowd smelt of garlic. The reverendo seemed to be quite a different person from good Father Giacomo, become inaccessible, a High Priest, serving a far-off God, with bell and incense and book and candle.

From the next Thursday the bells were silent. At the hours of the offices a boy went round the paese with wooden clappers, announcing what passed at the altar:

"Buona gente, ora viene la Passione, —"

On Friday night the procession wound itself through the twisted streets of the paese, filling the whole little town with the shuffle of its feet and the monotony of its chanting. The flare of its torches, red and yellow, traveled across the walls among the very black shadows of the night that had no moon. The whole paese poured itself out into the streets to follow the reverendo as he carried the Host. Every house in the paese had a candle set in its window, and every house was empty, for the whole paese walked with the procession.

In the church the sepulture was dressed with the white bleached grasses which the people had been

growing for weeks past from seeds sown in cups and bowls kept in the dark. There was no light anywhere in the church, except at the sepulture, and the walls were draped all in black. There were no flowers. One felt that death was there.

On Saturday the holy water for the year was blessed; all the paese came to the midday mass, bringing water in bowls and jars of every sort that it might be blessed.

Then, upon the week's darkness and voicelessness, came Easter Day, festival of the merry, splendid old gods and of the Man of Sorrows, — the most beautiful day of the year. Everywhere life was risen from the dead, everywhere triumphed the hope of the world. One would build altars in the new grass.

XXVIII

SPRING deepened, everything grew intenser. There was a sense in it, Florida felt, of everything's gathering towards some climax; the days grew hotter, the sunlight was a whiter blaze, the shadows of all things were the bluer by contrast, all the fruit trees were in fuller flower, and the gardens were heaping up loveliness towards their highest bloom. The waters of the hills the more and more filled all the world with their soft insistency. The sound of the many little torrents of the hillside came like a singing voice to Florida in the nights when she lay awake in her painted room, and more and more she had the fancy that the voice was trying to tell her something. And more and more the piazza voice had, in some indefinable way, to do with the voice of the waters. As she came from the castle, from her long hours there, she could hear, from yet far off, the piazza's voice

each time more and more definitely, expressive of something, it seemed to her, that ought to be understood. The whole town was in the piazza in those days, that were each hotter than the last. It was nearing the time of conscription. That was always a bad time for the paese. Always then the men drank too much, and their singing as they racketed in bands, arm thrown across shoulder, clumsy boots shuffling in an effort to keep step, up and down the streets, brought out a crowd to follow, and moved it to a mood dangerous enough.

“Addio bella, addio
L'armata se ne va
Se non partissi anch'io
Sarebbe una viltà.
Ma non ti lascio sola,
Ti lascio un figlio ancor,
Sara quel chi ti consola,
Il figlio dell' amor.”

Always the fisarmonica and the organetto kept up their melancholy discord the night through under the caffè's laurel branch:

“Su, fratelli, su campagne,
Su, veniamo in fitta schiera,
Sulla libera bandiera,
Splende il sol dell' avenir —”

There was always some one too to start up the Hymn of the Man out of Work, and to pour into it all the wrath that had no special object, and was for that the more violent. In the paese at the bad time this year it was worse than ever. It was the year the government began its new drafting, — supporters of families were taken this year, and only sons, and it meant things rather dreadful to the paese. The suspense of waiting to know who from the list, sent in by the communal secretary to the commissario di leva, of those come to the age of twenty-one, were to be or-

dered away, told more than ever on the paese this year. The little stories of the town's life turned tragic, and there was a telling out aloud of it all there in the piazza. The people, who were not much given to talking, talked now the more for past silences. This man must leave his wife whom he had just married, the child of that man would be born while he was away, this one must leave his mother who was old and near to death, and what would become of that man's children who had no mother, and what of that man's sweetheart he would have married? The whole desolation of the thing came home to Florida as she watched it in those days. She saw so well how the people, who were dull enough and slavish yet, and did not, and could not, understand, took this, out of a life's acceptance of hard things, as a thing to rebel against, and how their rebellion came to take just the form it did of drinking and quarreling and hurting only themselves. There was so long to wait, too. The *commisario di leva* sent to each man of age a notice of the day and hour when he should come to the *municipio* for the drawing of the numbers. Nobody seemed quite clear as to what the number drawing meant, and the waiting was made the more intense by the ignorance that filled it up with strange imaginings and fears. Florida, looking on at it all with an understanding little plainer than these poor people's, came to understand very terribly well, *not* the laws, or their right and reason, but the thing that is the cause and excuse of really all life's misery, not only in the little Ligurian rock-town but all the world over, the failure, the hopeless inability, to understand. In the laws of the State, the will of the nearest master, the laws of all life, the will of God, — whoever, whatever he may be, — there was just one inevitable and great injustice, — that some

one's will is done to us without our understanding, that those of us on whom it bears most are, by very reason of its so bearing, crushed, as under the weight of it, and made, just by it, itself, incapable of understanding it. They did not understand, and they could not understand, these people, who, for one reason or another, by this party or that, this individual or that, were made to suffer. The Signorina, with Vanini, in the crowd before the municipio on the day of the number drawing, came to an understanding of why men are cowards, and why they break laws, and that understanding, at least, she was to keep always.

One night just after the going away of the conscripts, coming down through the paese from the castle, she found a crowd in the piazza, hostile and alien. Vanini came to her from somewhere in the crowd. Something in his face made her ask anxiously: "What is the matter?"

"There is an ugly mood," he said; "it seems to be upon all of us, and everything. I will walk home with you, Signorina."

As they pushed through the group of men at the caffè door she caught something they muttered about the castle lady.

"Don't stop, Signorina," said Vanini, speaking in English.

She looked at him in surprise, because she had never thought he could be afraid. One of the men spoke to her, — it was Antò Moti: "Friend of the castle lady," he snarled at her, "go away from us." At the same time she caught several voices saying: "Shame to thee, Antò Moti."

Vanini would have made her pass quickly, but she stopped. "What is it?" she asked directly of Moti. He snarled again at her, something in the dialect she could not understand.

"Do not heed him, Signorina," said some one in the crowd. Some one else said: "We have nothing against you, Signorina."

"But the castle lady," insisted Florida, "what can you have against her? You know no trouble of yours is her fault, and you know she would do anything to help you. What is it you have against her?"

A growl answered her, that came not from one man but from the whole crowd of them, as if all their anger and trouble and threatening were put into one voice.

"What have you against the castle lady?" she repeated. "Is there one of you she has not tried to help?"

"It's not her help we want," called out a woman's voice from the crowd. It was the voice of Giulin Settinella. Her husband was still held in the Ventimiglia prison. He and she had always quarreled, but since he'd been away from her she seemed to have become quite worshipful of him, and had a way of speaking of him that made him appear as a martyr to some fine cause. Now she called out, in a voice that all the piazza heard, the women peering on tiptoe to listen over the men's shoulders, the children leaving their games to gape at the excitement from the shelter of their mothers' skirts, "It's not her help we want; it's to be rid of her, who has brought ill fortune on us, and death to us, and the tearing from us of those we love!"

Florida felt a hand strongly pressing her arm. She turned and saw Chichetta, curiously in earnest, meeting her gaze with imploring eyes, and saying: "Signorina, my mother has been so ill all day, and all day has been asking for you. Won't you come to her now, quickly? It is so her wish to see

you, and she has been begging for you all the day long."

Florida did not take it in till afterwards that, though the old woman was ill and did want her, it was just a pretext of Chichetta's to get her away from a very real danger that was there for her. She went with Chichetta, and wondered afterwards that she had not given more thought to the threat that there had been, the prophecy, the warning she had n't realized in those confused moments when she touched the crowd's temper. She wondered afterwards, too, that the crowd's temper should not have troubled her more than it did. She was in a mood that, it seemed, nothing of this world could trouble, utterly far away from the people to whom she had belonged, who had not ever asked of her or given to her.

And more and more this distant place, this distant mood which she had come to and made her life in, came to belong to Vanini. She liked to look to him as master of this new life and of her. He was the master in this place that was so his own, and in his place he was wonderful, a man who had no thought of self, whose whole life was a giving, whose humility was a beautiful great strength, whose kindness was without limit. Whether against the background of Chichetta's dark old stone rooms or Florida's own painted walls, of some cabin's close-packed gloom, or of the street's old, worn colors, the stir of the piazza's gathering, he was beautiful. His hands were beautiful as they did rough little humble services, and his eyes, mirroring his world's rough, humble little beautiful things. He was beautiful out in the flowering hills. As they sat under the olives she would make him recite to her, perhaps from great books, perhaps from the unstored treasure of his people, the Rispetti and the Stornelli:

*"Fior di limone,
E io degli stornelli ne so tanti."*

He was beautiful among her books, which even her scholarly father had not so fully possessed as had this man, to whom they meant thought and emotion, as well as intellectual passion. She saw him contrasted with Illsboro, two whole worlds apart. She laughed when she thought of what Vanini would have been in that other world, in his red shirt, at the tea-table, bowing too low (like the poet) before the dear duchess, or else standing tall and tense, expressive and violent of gesture, raging with contempt of these people whose neglected opportunities were so far more than his. Her Vanini, what would n't he have done with a tenth of those people's chances?

Her mood deepened with the season's deepening. Of a morning when Maria Domenica, clattering in with her wooden sandals, would come to the painted room, "Don't quite wake me," Florida would say; "I want this to last a little longer." And she would shut her eyes again, and all the things of the day ahead would be absurdly, beautifully flung together, as in a dream's confusion, with something of that strange intensity a dream gives, lifting it all above the usual, making it all a little more truly happy and beautiful. The peace one may know in the first moments of waking, when the mists of sleep still soften yesterdays and to-morrows, and all beautiful things may be in store for one to-day, would come to her there before Maria Domenica returned and the real day began.

XXIX

One day the Canta Storie came to the piazza.
He was an old man and perhaps a little "toccato,"

as they say, in his shaggy gray head. He wore a green ribbon strung with bells round his neck, and had a crow's feather stuck in his little red cap. He carried a pair of brass clappers, and he beat them, marching up and down the piazza, his little bells all tinkling.

People came out from the houses and running up from the side streets to see him. Everybody knew the *Canta Storie*, for he came year after year to the paese. He would gather in the piazza all the people who would listen to him, and then, sitting on the church steps, or standing up to gesture, or coming down among the people to march about and wave his hands in illustration of his story, he would tell strange things in a strange sort of sing-song cantilena. The people would give him in return perhaps a few pennies, surely his supper and a night's lodging, probably old clothes, and wine and bread and cheese to go on with to-morrow on his way to the next town in the hills. The stories he told were strange stories that had been told so often and so long by his wandering kind that they had grown confused and faded in the telling. There were stories of old gods and heroes and saints, legends that had lost all but the vaguest of meanings, but the more mysteriously fascinating because of that. Florida, coming out from Chichetta's rooms to join the crowd in the piazza, listened, understanding very little. Not only the confusion of dialects was difficult for her to follow, but many of the old man's words had been obsolete for generations. Probably he himself did not altogether understand, but told his story as a child repeats things that please him, he does not know why.

This time he came it was twilight, a close, hot evening, so still that all the resonance of the night's little voices came to the piazza. One heard the cicale,

and the frogs, and sometimes a bird note over the hush of the crowd. The voice of the Canta Storie droned on, low-pitched and mysterious. The story, Florida understood vaguely, was all about water. It had to do with the piazza fountain, that she understood, and with its source up in the castle gardens, and the old gods to whom on a time all the waters of the hills had belonged, whom the people had served in the old days with dancing and singing, a worship of joy. And it had to do with the new god too, whose cross had been set up by the edge of the piazza fountain, here where the church stood, by the Man in the black dress, an emblem of pain and shame and sorrow, and of the strange worship of suffering. The voice of the Canta Storie dropped and "made darkness," as they say in the paese, as he told of the coming of the worship of sorrow, of the old gods' anger and of a people's fear of it, in some time long ago.

"God of all gods!" he cried, all his bells a-tinkle. "Who of you but knows what the loss of the waters would mean to the paese! Suppose the anger of the old gods prevailed and turned the waters bitter. . . ."

A shudder spread through the crowd, a thing one felt, physically. The piazza had grown quite dark by the time the Canta Storie came to the point of fear in his story, the fear of something that the wrath of the old gods might bring disastrously upon the waters of the fountain, a punishment for some evil that had come among the people. The old man stopped quite suddenly.

Somebody in the dark cried out: "Go on, Nonno, go on."

"That is all I know," he said.

Soeu' Teré's old voice cried out from somewhere

among the people: "I know the rest, you need not ask him, I can tell you the rest, when I will."

XXX

THERE came no answer from Alicia to Florida's letter, and Florida and Illsboro did not talk of her again. It was all so deadly inevitable. There was nothing to do about it all but just that which must be done, and it all went on just as it had to go. Often there would be some little note of her in the papers, the lovely Miss Temple-Vaulx being here or there, doing this or that, with a mention of Marcento invariably, and a question raised, — were they engaged, though the young lady denied it? A hint, — according to this, to that, it would certainly seem so. There was a letter from the duchess, from Cannes, but she said nothing about Alicia. It was just a short, kind little letter, that Florida would have been grateful for at a moment of less complete detachment from all that other world in her freedom here. She told Gerrard of the letter. "Her letters are so unlike her," she said; "or perhaps it's just that they are so unlike her clothes."

"It's late for — those people — to be staying on at Cannes," was all Illsboro said, "and with this hot weather, too."

It was very hot. The season had come to its height, was at its very edge. There was a moment, it seemed, supreme, the crest reached, and even in that moment one knew that beyond it there was a going down on the other side, a falling over the edge, from perfection to decay, from increase to the irrevocable decline. The moment came, and she knew it; took hold of it, as it were, and held it, while it

lasted; and somehow, it almost seemed, so actual a thing the moment was, that she could take it out of her life and lay it aside, treasuring it always.

The little episode was not especially salient, one would have said, looking back along the days and hours of that so special time of hers. One white, hot morning she and Vanini, coming down from an early, long wandering through the hills, stopped in again at the little chapel, where, in the winter, they had stood together before the Man on the Cross, and Florida had felt such anger against the cult of sorrow. That anger seemed strange to her now. In their walk before they came to the chapel Vanini had been half reciting, half singing to her some beautiful words in his beautiful voice. It was not that she understood at all what he put into the words for her, but that she felt it, not analyzing it, a background for this little high moment of hers. Nobody had ever had a voice more beautiful than Vanini's or more expressive. He sang:

“Fior di cipresso.
Accenditi, candela, in su quel masso,
Fa lume all' amor mio che passa adesso.
Fior d'argento.
Ah! per amarvi voi ho pianto tanto!
Povero pianto mio gettato al vento!”

Among all the people she had known she had never heard a voice of such charm for her. It seemed to draw her, and close over her in the spell of this new world she had chosen for the better part.

“Ho fatto tante lagrime, e poi tante, —”

“Signorina —”

“Yes, Vanini.”

“The tears, — do you understand, Signorina? But no, you understand all else, but that you do not understand.”

They went into the little chapel again, and stood again before the Man on the Cross. Her anger of that other time seemed strange to her now. It was as if, in the time since, she had grown accustomed to sorrow, come to acknowledge it as the thing that was greatest of all things in this world. Sorrow, and only sorrow, brought people together and gave them sympathy with one another and understanding. It was for his sorrow one loved the Man of the Cross; it made him greater than the old joyous gods.

The sun moats danced through the closed-in dusk of the little chapel. There was dust everywhere, and cobwebs dusty and gray spread over everything, showing against the gray-green mildew or the red of rust.

Florida said: "Vanini, let's put the chapel in order; let's fill it full of flowers, and make a little worship all of our own in it."

"You know they have forbidden me to go into a church, Signorina," he answered.

"They have no right to forbid you here," she said; "the Christ here they have left alone. It is not as in their churches, for this is His, not theirs, only just His, alone, and the spiders', and ours."

They spent the whole morning setting the chapel in order. They had never in all their time together, and each with different interpretation knew it, been quite so close as they were in that morning, doing their little fantastic service in the chapel. They made the same little act of devotion of it, and it was for the same God that they did it, in the same half-cynical, half-sentimental, wholly worshipful way. They heaped all they could find of the hill's flowers — wild narcissus and myosotis and those strange little black and gold orchids — at the feet of the Man on the Cross. They went out from the dusk of the chapel into

the day's white heat, and went down by the path, that was scarcely more trodden than the bed of a torrent, through the olives, to the garden house, with the spell upon them of a mood that was intense with all the season's accumulated intensity, the *maggiolata*, that had in it of all the land's enchantment. They did not go into the garden house, but stopped by the old well, and sat together on the bench under the cypresses and the little new pear tree that had now passed its bloom. The roses were almost over, the garden was red with the coral tints of their despoiled bushes. Only the *gloria di fortuna* in their deepest gold, so far more beautiful than the rest, made up for lack of all the others. It was the most perfect moment of the garden. Florida was to remember it like that, looking back to it, long afterward. It was the high moment of the garden's bloom and of her happiness with Vanini. She had never before so felt, so delighted in her love for him. It seemed to her a most beautiful thing, as beautiful as the love of some little sister of the Clairs for the Poverello. The white and purple iris were tall on either side of the path. Odors of every flower filled the garden, and sounds of bee and bird; sound and fragrance together made an exquisite burden, not yet too heavy, in the day's soft blue.

The Signorina slipped down from the bench to the grass, sitting there and leaning back against the cool stone of the bench. She took off her hat and threw it down beside her, and all the sunshine showed in her hair. "Vanini, tell me more," she said.

She did not know at all what the moment that was so happy for her meant to him. And he did not tell her. He looked down at the sunshine in her hair and kept on singing to her things she did not understand in the old words of his people:

"Fior di limone.
 E tu sei stata lo mio primo amore,
 E l'ultimo sarai . . .
 E l'idolo se'tu degli occhi miei:
 Ti voglio amare infin che'l mondo dura.
 Fior di ginestra.
 Dentro dello mio petto c'è una nave:
 Con i capelli tuoi formo le vele,
 e le lagrime mie l'acqua del mare — '

Signorina," he broke off suddenly, "it is true that the shadow of coming things falls before them. I am in the shadow, Signorina; I have always been in the shadow, but I feel it in this moment as I have never felt it before.

'Fiorin d'abeto.
 Ho perso lo mio amor: son disperato, —
 Ho perso lo mio amor.'

XXXI

IN those days it came about somehow, Florida never really understood quite how, that when she went up through the paese on her way to the castle, and passed the piazza fountain to climb the path up along the aqueduct by the lavatoio, some one, perhaps many of the paese people, crowding about her, would say: "Don't go to the castle, Signorina! Don't!" And the people in those days had very troubled looks for her. Sometimes she saw them make the sign as she passed. She did not dare to speak of that. It would have sufficed for one ever so merely to speak of it, she felt, to bring out something that lurked and hid, and perhaps force things to some rather dreadful climax. "The Signorina must not go to the castle," Rina would say, with a gesture as if to block her path, and Marietta would cling to her hand and say: "Don't go, my Signo-

rina." Even Chichetta would say: "The Signorina should not go to the castle." Then Giulin Settinella would shrug her shoulders and say: "The Signorina will go, one cannot stop her." And old Soeu' Teré would mutter: "There is no stopping her, no stopping her."

"There is some reason," insisted even Maria Domenica, trying to detain her days through in the garden; "even if it is not the reason that they think, still there is some real reason, why one should not go to the castle, Signorina."

One day, as Florida came up by the lavatoio, a woman, whose name she did not even know, quite refused to let her pass, and would have prevented her, but that Soeu' Teré broke in upon it, giving her no chance to speak: "She must go, she must, the Signorina, she must, because it is written so. Let her go, I tell you, one cannot alter things that are written. Let her go, and you will see." And for some reason, as if the old witch's command were not to be disputed, the woman stood aside and the Signorina passed.

If only it had not been for the blessing of the waters things might not have gone as dreadfully far as at last they did go. The reverendo had not the least idea who suggested to him, or whether nobody had suggested and it had just occurred to him, to revive the old ceremony of blessing the fountain. The paese had long forgotten that custom, old as the town itself. The oldest people of the town knew that there had been in past times a yearly blessing of the fountain; the people who had been old in the paese when the people now oldest of it were young, had told them how in their youth long ago they remembered the custom then dying out. What it meant no one knew. Soeu' Teré said it had been done to keep

the taste of death out of the waters. The reverendo did not in the least realize that he did it because the contagion of fear that was in the air communicated itself to him. He did not realize that in doing what he did he laid stress upon the very thing that, because it could not be met outright and fought, should have been as much as possible passed over. He had no idea he was admitting that anything was wrong with the water, or that the people would see in what he did an attempt to break some spell which his unconscious touching on gave shape to for them. He knew that the tale of the *Canta Storie* had taken possession in some way of the imagination of the people, and he wanted to Christianize the story and give all honor to the God of the Cross. He talked about it in his predica on the last Sunday of May, and told the people how that God of the Cross watched and cared for their well-being and gave them the water. He tried to make them see in it a symbol. He was very earnest, and every one listened earnestly, but outside afterwards on the church steps people said to one another: "Seest thou? He knows." "He knows," they said to one another.

"He won't tell us what he knows," said Soeu' Teré, "but he need not, for we, too, know. We know that it is because of some one who is among us —"

"Some one who is among us," muttered the people one to another, and avoided looking to the castle.

At the castle, the lady, never going out of the grounds, might easily not have known anything at all of the piazza's mood against her. Gianin was the only one of her servants who had anything to do with the town people, and it was not likely that he would have told her. Illsboro, speaking very scant Italian and having no understanding of the people, if he had

heard of it, probably would not much have noticed. Things went on there very quietly, each day like the last and the next. Florida was always at the castle, and Vanini was much there. He and Illsboro talked less and spent hours just smoking silently together. It amused the Signorina to see Vanini so quiet, even his hands still. He and the lady said very little to one another, but he watched always to do her small services, to move a cushion, to raise or lower a blind, to fetch her something she had not asked for, little cares Illsboro would never have thought of. He used to read aloud to them sometimes. Florida afterwards always liked especially to remember his reading St. Francis' *Cantico del Sole*, in the time of one glorious sunset, when they had raised the west awnings and there came to them all the glory of the "Altissimo, onnipotente, bon Signore." Vanini's face had the lighted look that was the most beautiful thing about him, and she loved all her life long to think of him lifting his lighted face so to the sun's great glory to say: "*Laudate benedicite, mio, Signore, e ringraziate e servitelo con grande umilitate.*"

The stone rooms of the castle were much cooler than out of doors, and they spent hours in the west room. Florida and Illsboro played dummy bridge there in the dragging, hot afternoons. There was a long mirror between the windows, framed in carved gilded wood, made beautiful with the care they gave such things in France a hundred and fifty years ago, and one night the lady called Illsboro to come and look at her as she stood there before the mirror. A bracket on either side of the glass held three tall white candles. The light of them drew the lady's white slenderness and grace out of the shadow behind her in the room and glowed on the soft stuff of

the dress she was wearing. Her bare white shoulders whiter than her dress, her throat that made one think of pearls and lilies, the oval of her face framed in the darkness of her hair, were drawn softly out of the shadow and took on a radiance in the candlelight. Her eyes were full of light in the candlelight.

"Look at me, Gerrard," she said; "for like this, for a minute, I am beautiful."

"Of course you're beautiful," he said. He came and stood by her looking at her in the mirror. "You're always beautiful."

"Don't be kind," she cried out sharply, with sudden, painful catching of her breath. "Don't be kind to me!"

He stared at her, puzzled and a little hurt. He did not in the least know what it meant to her that he should be kind to her. Kindness had taken the place of love and everything else. But he did not know that she knew that. He scarcely knew it himself, so little he thought about things. He was kind to her because he had loved her very much, and very long, and because she was dying. He had no idea that his kindness meant just that to her,—that everything was past, except the one thing that was coming.

She had wanted him never to know. Only in that one minute, as he looked at her in the glass, she had not been able to help crying out. She saw that he did not understand, and she gathered all her strength and laughed at him, with all the loveliness of her dimples and her sweet mouth and starry eyes. "You old thing," she said, "how nice you are. I'm hideous usually now, but as long as you don't mind it, it does n't matter. And to-night, somehow or other, I really am what I want you to think me. Look at me in the glass; I want you always to remember me this

way, and to think of me as beautiful and happy; one you have been good to, whose whole life you have made glad."

She let the words fall. Something of them seemed to stay on in the very air of the moment she left silent. She wanted him to think of her as one his kindness had helped to the end, who to the end had taken his kindness for the love he would have kept on giving if he could, one about whom he need have no regret. For that she must not make a stage thing out of it. She stopped, in telling him, and bent to arrange her skirt a little before the mirror.

"Would you believe that Léonie made this dress?" she said. "When next we're in Paris I shall really have to furbish up a bit, but, considering, this is n't half bad, is it now?"

And then suddenly there went out of her love all selfishness, and there was left only the quite perfect thing of it. All the love she had given him in the years had been an accumulation, mounting, mounting to this moment when, standing before the mirror talking about her dress, she gave up the last selfish thing she had clung to, the desire that he should remember her. She had so wanted happiness for him that she had brought herself not to mind dying, that she might leave him free to take of it. Yet all the time, even so, she had been wanting him to remember, though the memory would have darkened things for him always and have been a cloud between him and all light. Now suddenly she did not any more want him to remember her, even as she stood there beautiful, before the mirror. She would not ask that the ten years be laid away in a box of gold and ivory, to be opened sometimes tenderly; she wanted that he should have left of her no thought at all; to go out of his life with the

rain and the sun of ten years, her memory to have no more part in it than the rain and the sun. The faith and readiness of twenty-five were his yet, the enthusiasm and power to enjoy with the added strength of experience and self-control. The ten years had passed by him in the wind, scarcely touching him. Often it had hurt her to feel that the ten years had not changed him more, that, after all, he would stand just where he had stood before, almost at the entrance of life, as ready as then to enter in. She would have wanted wounds to keep in memory of him, she would have loved wounds that the world had given her because of him. She would have worn them proudly, all her life, had he been dying and leaving her, as she was leaving him, to go on. She would have wanted wreck and ruin and knowledge; she had given him all, all, and had nothing left but the knowledge and the ruin and the wreck. She flung away everything she had of selfishness as she turned to him and said, laughing a little: "Gerry, I'm a stupid old thing, and very conceited; never mind me, come and dress for dinner."

There was a piano in the west room. One night when they were all there Illsboro would have the lady play. "You used to play so rippingly," he said.

She went to the piano and sat down. "Play that thing you used to play. Where was it?" said Illsboro. "Was it in Venice, or when we had the villa at Corfu, ages ago?"

Vanini lighted the lamp by the piano for her. The soft lamplight was all about her as she sat before it. She put her white hands out in the lamplight over the white keys, but did not touch the keys. "I can't," she said; "I simply can't."

"But you used to so rippingly," Illsboro said; "you used to put all the — all everything, don't you

know, into it, so rippingly. You used to make one feel things so."

"I can't," she said, and turned to Florida; and Florida said: "I hate music, hate it, simply. Don't play anything, come out on the terrace and I'll tell you silly stories."

That night when Florida stood at the garden-house gate with Vanini, who had walked down with her, she said: "Was n't it dreadful, Vanini? And Illsboro did n't in the least understand. My Vanini, dear, I love you; you're the only man in all the world who understands. Good-night, Poverello."

In many ways everything turned strange with the turn of the year. The gardens had over-blossomed and were dying of their own luxuriance. It had all been too lavish, too magnificent, and, following out the law of life, by excess it had fallen from perfection to decay, high attainment to decadence. And Florida, down with the fever of the year, hated and loved the decadence, felt all its influences, horrible and adorable, felt herself to be drawing happiness very intensely close in the shadow of pain. What was it about snatching red pleasure from the teeth of pain? She did not trouble to remember, but she got from the word a vivid sense of her mood then. She could not bear the paese in these days, there was something strange it seemed to her, alien, in all the faces. The voice of the paese was horrible in the heat, and yet she loved it more than ever. It really was because she loved it that it frightened her so.

There was indeed reason to be frightened. There had come up some new trouble in the intense little politics of the town. The Signorina did not in the least understand what it was, something Vanini tried to explain about a quarrel at the dazio, unfair treatment of somebody brought before the Sindaco, favoritism

shown. Trouble, too, had come up again from the old affair of the morra. Settinella was back from prison and was talking badly at the caffè, the other man had died in the Ventimiglia prison. It was easy to tell stories of ill treatment and his suffering. The excitement of conscription time yet hung over the town. Everything seemed wrong and strange. Rina Moti had gone away, leaving the baby with her old father. No one knew where she had gone. She came to see the Signorina one night, and kissed her hands, and cried, without saying why, and was gone from the paese next morning. Marietta was to be married. She was to marry an old man, who would give her a yellow dress in which she could complete the subjugation of Beppe Manzoni. Chichetta went her snappy, snarling way, and adopted Pippo, whose aunt had turned him out because of the seemingly adequate reason that he drank and gambled and stole.

Toinetta was radiant, and her baby was the most beautiful, frail little creature that ever tumbled on velvet carpet or mud floor. One morning Soeu' Teré came to the garden house and sat all day in Florida's book-room, not speaking a word, but nodding her head incessantly and staring at Florida as she moved about. It was part of the strangeness of all things.

Sometimes it seemed to Florida that her dread of things came, somehow, from the way the heat quivered knee deep down the garden paths and over the piazza's cobbles, and the intolerable buzzing of flies that came from where flowers died in the garden beds and out from the doorways of the houses. It was beautiful to go from the heat of the day, the dizzy blinding heat, from the violence of the over-wrought gardens and town, from the garden's fever and men's fever, into the dim, cool stone rooms of the castle,

where the lady spent her days, now, at last, after all the torment, in a great quietness. It seemed as if the lady were happy, she was so quiet. She was like some one who had passed through things, and come out, far and high, upon the quiet places. Her voice was quiet and cool, and the touch of her hand too, and somehow it seemed as if, for all she was so near in lovingness, she was all the time quietly drawing away from all things. She was drawing away, surely. It had been since the moment when she stood before the mirror and talked about her dress. After that moment it had all been quite simple; she had never in all the years been so close to Gerrard as in the days when she was drawing away from him, quietly, without his knowing it, so that, when the end of this part of his life should come, she might just go out of it, as a shadow out of a room where a light is brought. Already she seemed to have passed beyond minding things. Gerrard's restlessness no longer hurt her, it was a thing she so well understood; just the bewildered restlessness of a child brought from some sunshiny out-of-doors into a room of darkened sorrow. He would go out again into the sunshine and this was only for a little while. She did not any more mind being ill; the horror had gone out of that, now that she had come to be glad it was only for a little while, and to look on it, as from beyond that little while, already. She did not any more mind being a "ghost." When, for the first time, going out of the castle grounds with Illsboro, she passed through the paese, she did not mind the dark looks and faces turned quickly from her. It was right people should hate her and the thing that she had done. She took it all as a far-off impersonal thing, as though she were as remote from it as some one who was already

dead. But she was very sweet now to the garden-house girl; she tried to draw away from her, too, but Florida was the one thing from which she could not draw away.

The girl had made a very strong and vivid thing of her and of the story in her life. In that one winter the castle lady had marked her as, in all the years, she had not marked Illsboro. And Florida was glad of the marks, glad that she could have them to wear all her life. The lady felt that, with pain and yet with intense comfort. Once she said, when they were alone in the garden, at twilight, with the swallows flying low, skimming the beds of purple pansies: "Poor little Flori, you'll be the only person in all the world to remember me." They were standing by the spring in its grotto, where the plaster nymph lay fallen and broken and overgrown with loveliness of live green things. The lady put her hands on Florida's shoulders and looked up into her face. "I want you to remember me," she said. "Only I'm so afraid that remembering will do you harm. Don't let the memory of me do you harm."

They never talked of Vanini, as they had that one night, or of Jack, nor did the lady ever talk of herself again. She drew away more and more from all the things of life, though Florida would not admit that, and kept very close to her, and would not let herself believe that any change could come into the magic circle that was laid round about them there, an invisible, an impassable wall.

Then, one day, in the soft monotony of azure days, something happened. The papers that Pascà's boy brought up, having taken his time, a matter of several days, because it was so hot, the *Petit Niçois*, the *Figaro*, the *Daily Mail*, gave the formal, authoritative announcement of Alicia's engagement to Mar-

cento; there were a dozen long names, really, but they called him *Gigi*, *Marchese degli Umbrini di Marceneto*, and announced the engagement. Florida had been sitting alone down on the marble bench by the wall. *Bacè*, singing, had come down the path to fill at the well the great stone jar he used for watering the garden. The jar was heavy, and he sang in a jerking, funny little way as he carried it, breathing hard.

“ ‘*Vorrei morire, e non vorrei morire,
Vorrei vedere chi mi piange e chi ride, —*’

“Oh, my *Signorina*, up at the house the post has come, all the journals,” he had called. “I will tell *Maria Domenica* to bring them here to the *Signorina*.”

He set the water jar down on the broad brim of the well and called between his hands: “*Ohè là, Maria Domenica, ohè là!*” and *Maria Domenica* had come, her apron thrown over her head to protect it from the hot noon sun, bringing Florida news of this thing that seemed so very far away.

XXXII

EVEN if Florida had not seen the castle papers opened and tossed down so, she would have known by *Illsboro's* face, as he came to meet her at the door of the west room, that he knew.

The castle stood with all its doors and windows darkened against the heat of the sun, the awnings lowered over the terrace, as she came up to it through the garden. The lady's chaise longue was empty, and her black lace veil was lying in it on the green cushions. By the chair where *Illsboro* had evidently been sitting, were the papers as he had let them fall on the floor.

Monna Lia called to her from the darkest corner of the room, and from the sofa there held out two hands to her:

"How nice of you to come in all the heat."

"Yes, frightfully hot," said Gerrard. "Wish you'd talk to Mary and make her let me take her away to some cooler place, anywhere. She's never been to Norway. There's a little place there I know of, where all the year round one feels the snow —"

He was "pretending" very bravely. Florida wanted to say to him: "Don't believe it. It's some dreadful mistake." And yet what was the use? There was no use or hope in it, anywhere.

She went and stood by the lady, looking from Illsboro down to her. It seemed to her she had never seen the lady so lovely, with such tints of sea-shells in her delicate face, and the starry look very wonderful about her eyes, the dimples giving such look of youth and happiness to her. It seemed to her that she had never seen her happier, and with no consciousness of the thing that was so tragically there, so close by her, for the other two. It was as if she were far away already from the things of life. The sense of her as already belonging to death, as being apart from all these things of life, drawn with the circle round, out of touch of any of life's things, came to Florida with a great wave of loneliness. She bent over and kissed the lady's two hands, and asked if she might stop to breakfast.

She stayed all day at the castle. It was a day of such dead heat as comes only at the end of the Southern spring, when the heat is a fever, and all things are grown horrible, as in a delirium, overwrought and ill, and too intense and strange. The sky was turned to brass and the earth to iron. In

the west room, between the jalousies, a thrust of light struck in sharp and hard as a knife, stabbing and red hot. The air that came in from the open windows was too sweet with the dying flowers in the garden. The sweetness in the air was the sweetness of death. It gave one the sense of a house where the blinds are closed, and there are white and purple flowers drooping in a certain upper room, and people speak in whispers, and open and close doors noiselessly, and strange steps sound on the stairs. Florida had never been in a house of mourning; her father and her child had died when she was far away from them: it was odd that the sense of such a house should be so present to her all that day at the castle. Her childhood stories of the castle, the griefs and fears that dwelt in the air of the old place and clung to the walls, lost their grandeur and their glamour, and all just came down to this story that was ending here, to the very simple thing, in all times and places of the world, that death is.

In the late afternoon, when it was bearable out of doors, Florida walked for a little with the lady in the garden. Down the garden paths the great, heavy-headed irises lay fallen, dragged down by their own weight on the gravel, bruised and crushed by their own weight in the fall. Florida must lean down and touch the iris, where they had fallen, with her hand. They were warm and soft to touch, and seemed to move under the touch, like sensate things, conscious of it. The petals that had fallen in pale depths from the roses where they climbed against the terrace walls, and the frisia and the anemones that lay in the garden beds, dragged down too by their own heaviness, sent up into the twilight a sweetness that was like a cry. It seemed to her that she suffered with the dying of the things in the garden. The air seemed to press

her, too, down with its warm thickness and sweetness. The lady was very tired at the end of the day, the heat made her head ache badly; she would go to bed and sleep and be well in the morning, and would Florida please stop on to dine with Gerrard.

"Is there nothing to be done?" Illsboro said to Florida when they were alone together, in the great stone dining-hall where, months before, Florida and the lady had had their one quite happy little dinner. Gianin had put the porto and the dried figs and grapes on the table, and they had told him he need not wait. It was so hot, they put out the candles and sat almost in the dark. Only the moonlight came in through the tall, fortress windows, and lay in white oblongs on the floor, reaching through the shadows to touch some polished surface here and there. "If only you could see her," he added; "if only she were here."

"I'd go to her," said Florida; "but if she wanted me, she'd find me. She knows I'm here, and that I'm her friend, and that I'd do anything for her, and that I care awfully what happens to her. If she wanted me she'd send for me, and if she does n't, there's nothing I can do. But she'll not fail of something in her that is very high and pure and true. I think she'll come somehow out of all this dreadfulness into something that there is for her, I'm sure of it, very beautiful, of her own."

Illsboro sat quite still looking at her across the table. She would have given anything she had to comfort him, but there was no comfort.

The last time the feeling had been strong upon her all that day, and that night, when she went up after dinner to say good-night to Monna Lia, she lingered as long as she could in the room of the four windows, turning back half a dozen times for some last word.

She went twice down the stairs, and came back; and then a third time, and came back, laughing at herself and saying: "One would think I were never to see you again."

Vanini, strangely enough, felt it too. She found him with Illsboro when she did go down at last from the lady's room. She asked him curiously, as they went down the path to the garden house together: "Why did you stand so long after we'd said good-night, there in the west room, just looking and looking?"

"I had a strange feeling, Signorina, that something was going to happen. I was wondering how it all would look when next I should see it again." And at the gate of the garden house he said to her: "Signorina, I wonder what it will be like when next we walk down this path again? Do you remember the first morning when we came down it together in the great clear wind?"

There was neither moonlight nor starlight, the darkness was thick and heavy and unstirred, and too sweet with the odors of the flowers that were dying.

"I am afraid," said the Signorina, "and I don't know why. You will always be my friend, Vanini?"

He did not answer for so long a time that she thought he had forgotten what she had asked of him. Then at last he said quietly: "I shall always try to be your friend, Signorina," and went away.

XXXIII

NEXT morning came the last letter from Jack. She left it by her plate while she ate her breakfast. She was breakfasting in the garden. Maria Domenica had set the little table in the shade of the cypresses and

was standing by her while she ate her coffee and rolls. It seemed to Florida afterwards that at the time she must have known she had never to breakfast like that again, quietly, in the garden. She kept Maria Domenica talking to her while she finished her breakfast. At the botton of the garden, hidden by the orange trees, Bacè was singing his summer song, ever so wearily. The sad trail of it hung in the hot air as if sadness and weariness dragged along after each falling note. So here, too, in this world of the Ivory Tower, life could be a weary thing, like that. Each stanza of the song ended heavily with an Amen.

“*Vorrei morire e vorrei alzar la voce,
Vorrei vedere chi porterà la croce. Amen.*”

And the Amen had a fatal sound, as if none of it, as if nothing in the world, were of any use.

“Maria Domenica,” asked Florida, “when once you’d got out into the life you wanted, why did you come back here?”

“I do not know, my Signorina.”

“You were not happy in your life; you wanted to get away from it into another life, and you did, and then you came back. You did not want to come back. I wonder what it was.”

“I do not know,” said Maria Domenica again; “but it was stronger than I; it was just the fatality of things.” She took away the little brass tray, the brown coffee-pot and rough green cup and plate.

Florida opened Jack’s letter.

He had been automobiling, since he landed, with some quite delightful new Americans. They’d made him late for Paris; missed the Polo and everything; but he liked new people like that; they were always generous and jolly; and the little girl was really a ripper. He had n’t had time to write for ages. He’d be in Paris next week, and she’d better join

him there as soon as she could. People were beginning to talk, and surely by this time she'd had enough of crazy things. And he added: "I miss my little girl quite awfully."

Why did he say that? Was it just to torture her with a "make believe" that it was true? All in an instant she was "making believe" again that he did really miss her; that he had missed her all along; that, though perhaps he had n't known it, the need of her had been there, all the time; that nobody else had filled the lack of her; that at last, now, he knew, and would meet her at the Gare du Lyons, in a mauve and azure and silvery Paris morning, however early it was her train arrived. She would see him there on the platform, as the train pulled in. Perhaps he'd have been waiting there ever so long, come much too soon in his eagerness to meet her. She imagined him watching for her at the passing carriage windows, with eyes that really showed how he cared, and his smile — a smile he would not have had for any one else — when he saw her. She imagined him hugging her before every one, and calling her his little girl. The make believe went on all wildly. They'd drive down the quais. They would have only a fiacre, the motor and all that would be left out of it, and the horse would ramble along very slowly. He would hold her hand, and listen while she told him everything, everything about Vanini, and how near she had come — How near she had come to what?

She started up, and flung herself out of the beautiful "make believe." No, Jack would not be at the station if she went back; he would be still asleep when she got to the apartment, in the Avenue du Bois; he'd have been out late last night. She would see him at noon, and he'd be awfully sweet, but he'd have to hurry off to Chantilly, or to Maison

Lafitte. And when he came back there'd be people there. And it would always be like that, — going out, or people being there; never a time to themselves. She could never tell him about the winter that she had seemed to live a whole life in, among the paese people, or about that woman of Illsboro's whom nobody could possibly know, nor about Vanini.

She went up to the castle. Halfway up the path beyond the paese, she met Illsboro coming down.

"I was coming to see you," he said. "Florida, this can't go on."

"What can't go on?"

"Your being with us. Look here, I've got a letter from your sister, forwarded from the Club. She wants me to go yachting with her and Bob next month. Suppose she'd speak to me if she knew I let you come to the castle? And what would Bob do if he knew? I feel such a cad."

"Who's going on the yacht?" asked Florida. She kept on towards the castle, and he turned and walked beside her.

"Alicia and Marcento and Jack and you, Florida."

"You'll go?" she said.

"I telegraphed No, of course."

They walked on in silence. When they came to the castle gate Illsboro said: "You can't come any further, Florida."

They stood and looked at one another.

"Don't think I don't understand and appreciate. I do most awfully much, and I think you're a little brick, I do. If there were more of them like you, the whole thing would be different. But there's no changing things, and one has to give in. There's no standing up against the world, d'y' see? You have just got to do what the world does and that's all there is about it."

"No, that is n't," said Florida; "I don't care about any world. Where shall I find her? In the garden, or is n't she down yet?"

"She won't see you."

"Gerrard, what have you done?"

"I told her how it was. She should never have let you come, and she knows it. She should n't have let you come that first time, and afterwards, when she was ill, she should n't have, and I should n't have."

"You told her that?"

"She told me. She knows it just as well as I do. She said to tell you so, — that she knew it. I should n't have let you keep on coming, after I got back that second time. Only it was all so ghastly, and it seemed as if I had to; but I should n't have. I'm sorry I did."

"Did you tell her that?"

"That I was sorry? Yes."

"And what did she do?"

"She did n't do anything. There's nothing to do. She just said I was right, and to tell you you'd be kindest to her if you did n't try to see her again. She said it would be much kinder of you if you did n't even come to say good-bye. Florida, I'm awfully, frightfully sorry. I say, Florida, don't look like that. Just that you've gotten to care so much, shows how wrong it's been. When she was ill we could n't think; now she's well it is different; don't you see?"

"She's dying," said Florida.

"No, Florida, truly no. She's better. Why, one can see how much better she is. And she tells me so herself, every day. Don't you worry about her. I'll never let her get ill like that again. I'll never go away and leave her. Never, I promise you."

"And if I go to her — you can't stop my going to her if I choose, you know — if I go to her you'll

say things like that to her again?" She said it slowly, needing time to see ahead how it would be, what it would be for the lady if she did go to the castle, and what it would be for herself if she did not go, and all that the lady had meant to her were taken out of her life.

"I must," he said. "It's not that I'm a brute, Florida; it's just the world."

"The world," said Florida, after him, like an echo.

Then she said: "I'll go back now. Please don't come with me. Go and find her, and stay with her. That's all."

She went back to the garden house into her room.

As she went down the Via della Porta, she caught a glimpse of Vanini in the cellar under one of the houses, helping a boy feed something to a sick mule. She stopped and called from the doorway:

"Vanini, I want you!"

"I'll come as soon as I've done with this, Signorina."

She went on down the hill path through the blinding heat to the garden house.

Maria Domenica kept her rooms there as cool as closed green blinds could make them, and she threw herself down on the bed under the blue Madonna and lay there all day. The hours passed and Vanini did not come. She did not know why she so wanted him to come. There seemed to be nothing else in the world but her wanting him to come. Maria Domenica brought her things to eat, which she would not eat. The hot, sweet, heavy air in the room was dark and thick, except where the sunlight made a red-hot ladder downwards slanting through the closed blinds. The sounds of bees and birds and cicale in the garden were intensely hot, like the fragrance of the heliotrope.

Night came at last, trembling with stars, and she went down into the garden.

XXXIV

THE light of the stars was curiously white upon the beds of candytuft and the marble rim of the strange old well.

When Vanini came he found her sitting on the broad stone rim of the well. He came suddenly out of the deep shadow of the cypresses, where the fire-flies glowed, and spoke suddenly out of the hot, throbbing stillness of the night. The night was alive with lights. The little lamps of the fire-flies came and went, red in the white starlight. The monotone of the frogs, the shrilling of crickets and grasshoppers, the owl's cry, the nightingale's outpouring, deepened the silence, and Vanini's voice seemed to belong to the garden and the night and the heat. He said: "I have tried very hard, Signorina, and it is of no use."

"What have you tried, Vanini?" she asked.

"Not to come here."

"You tried not to come to me? Why, Vanini?"

"I cannot say it, Signorina."

"Then I will say it for you. You love me; is it not so?"

"Until to-night I had meant that the Signorina should never know it."

They were speaking in Italian, and for almost the first time since she had known him, he used the third person in addressing her.

"But I am so glad of it, Vanini. I think it is the only thing that I am glad of in all my life, except that I can still love the wind and the sun and rain."

Vanini, always using the third person, like a bar-

rier between them, said: "I would have the Signorina accept my love like that, — like the wind and the sun and the rain. I have tried to keep it a beautiful love, to make it worthy of the Signorina. I thought she did not know." He stood at a little distance from her, bareheaded, his rough shirt open at the throat, his face lifted to the starlight. "I thought the Signorina would be angry, if she knew," he said, "perhaps not understanding the sort of love it was, — just a tribute, valueless, but the highest I can pay, all that I can pay, Signorina. My love is given to the Signorina for all time. I ask nothing but that she may remember, sometimes, that, wherever she is, though I never see her, though I never hear of her, my love is with her." He was the poet, the visionary, standing there in the starlight. He worshiped, and all he asked was leave to worship. "The Signorina has given me a great light," he said, "upon all the road."

She wondered then, half amused, if any other woman had been told of love like that, in the third person. His intense words and voice and manner went strangely with its grave formality and stateliness.

"Vanini, do you know," she said, "that I love you, very dearly? Do you know what your friendship is to me, Vanini? Just your being here so much with me, just the having you, how can I say it? It has been part of the beauty, of all this beauty that is dying because it was too beautiful. And of all the struggle that went before. It has been part of all the struggle, and of all the beauty, and of all the dream. How much we have talked, Vanini, and how much we've been silent! We have only had to look at one another and understand, and how hard we've worked together! Do you not know how much I owe to you, Vanini, how much I love you?"

"The Signorina is kind, but she must not say these things."

"Listen, Vanini." As she sat there on the rim of the well, she leaned toward him a little. She had not changed the short-skirted white dress she had worn all day. She looked very childish in it, not a woman of another world, infinitely far from him, separated from him by an intangible, an impassable barrier. "Come nearer, Vanini."

He came nearer, and stood looking, not at her, but down into the well that was full of stars. There were tall white lilies growing by the well, white moths flitting over them, and fire-flies lighting up their pallor.

"I want to ask you something," the Signorina went on, looking up at him. "Vanini, will you let me come and live with you? I don't care how or where. We'll have nothing for ourselves but people and work and deprivation and each other, and the hills and the sun. Vanini —" Still he stood not looking at her. "Let me come. I know just what I'm saying. I mean it desperately. It's all I've got to hope for. I can't go back. I can't go back to that other world, that life, I *can't*, Vanini."

He only stood there. She forgot everything. "I can't go back," she cried, "to my husband, who does n't care, to that life I hate, when he does n't care. I can't, I can't!"

That she would go, nevertheless, she knew, with every appreciation of its inevitableness and cruelty if no one helped her to escape from it, and burn the bridges of the dreaded way back; and the misery of it all came into her voice.

"You've got to help me, Vanini, you've got to let me come to you, if you care at all, as you say you do, if you love me at all."

Vanini came to her with one step, and took her wrists in his long, thin, strong hands.

"I am going to kill you," he said. He held her with his two hands hot on her wrists, as she sat on the edge of the well. "I am going to throw you into the well," he said, "down there with the stars. You will go down, and down, and there is no bottom. I am going to kill you, because I love you. I love you as I would worship the Madonna, and I love you in a way that is not like that. I have tried to keep it as worship, as only worship, but it is not that. It is the thing that love always is, and it is terrible."

She did not move as he held her; she only said, in a bewildered way, "Why would you kill me, Vanini, if you love me, and I say take me?"

"Because I could not keep you. It is stronger than we are. You are of your world, and you cannot live out of it. You would go back to it, in the end. How do I know that? Why? Because you love your husband. You love him, and he is your world, and nothing can keep you from it and from him. You would go back to him. Oh, I know — I always knew that. I thought I could bear it, but I cannot bear it. I will not have you go back to him and to that world. And to keep you from that, from him, for myself, do you understand, to keep you for myself, I shall kill you!"

Then the Signorina laughed. "Oh no," she cried, "you 'll not kill me, Vanini, for I shall kill myself." And as she spoke she flung herself backwards over the rim of the well, struggling and tearing to get her hands away while his held her back.

He held her back with all his strength. An instant before and he had thought he meant, perhaps he had meant, to kill her; but now he was holding her back with all his strength. He needed all

his strength, for she was very strong and quite mad. The horrible depths of the well were under her head and shoulders, and her hair fell away from her face against the ferns. He dragged her back with all his strength, and away from the well, and stood holding her, not daring to let her go. There were minutes, whole minutes of it.

Then, because it could not last, things came to themselves suddenly, and he saw that the wildness had gone out of her face. It was such a young face, and so white, and when the wildness had passed out of it, so very pitiful. Her lips quivered and her chin; he saw her eyes cloud over in the starlight. She laughed pathetically.

"Don't look at me, Vanini," she said. "I'm going to cry, and, oh, it is so stupid just to cry."

He let her hands go, and she covered her face with them. He was trembling; for a moment he thought he could not stand. The terrible thing that had held him had let him go again. He stood swaying. He had a great fear that she might try to get to the well again, and that, if she did, he would stand there paralyzed, not able to move to stop her. It was like a thing in some dreadful nightmare. He wondered if he could cry out. He had a great fear that he would have no voice.

She did not try to get back to the well; she sank down on the grass in a white heap with her hair tumbled about her face, and hid her face in her hands, and sobbed as children sob.

He came to her and knelt beside her, "Don't, Signorina, don't."

After all the high tragedy she was only sobbing in the grass, and he was kneeling by, kissing her hands, where her tears wet them as they covered her face, helplessly sobbing too.

XXXV

SHE had begged him, when, after that mad little hour, he had taken her to Maria Domenica and seen her safe before going away, "You will come back to-morrow?" She did not know what she meant, nor did he, nor what he meant when he promised her that he would, nor what to-morrow could possibly hold for them.

He had made her promise, while he knelt by her in the grass, that she would never, never do a thing like the thing she had tried to do at the well. She had thought he would have gone mad if she did not promise. He had said her promise of that was the only thing that could make him feel she had forgiven him, and that if he could not feel that, he could not, *could not*, go on living; and, wild as his words were, she had known that they were true. He had said wild things as he covered her tear-wet hands with kisses, but in all the wild things he said, there was not one word of the other love, that love which was not worship. He could not bear the world if she were not in it, or if he could not feel that she forgave him. He must know that she lived somewhere and that he had been forgiven. He asked nothing more than to know that. He would not ask her even to think of him. He had forfeited his right to a thought. But she must promise to stay in the world and to forgive to-night.

She had promised, and he had taken her to the house, and seen Maria Domenica scold her, because her dress was wet with dew, and pet her because her cheeks were pale, and when he was going away she had besought him to come again to-morrow.

He did come to-morrow.

It was a little past noon. He came into her cool,

darkened, quiet sitting-room, as suddenly as he had come that first night, so long ago, and the sunlight followed him in, as the wind had followed him that other night. It blinded Florida for an instant.

When she saw his face she cried out, "Oh, what has happened? What is it?"

"Signorina, a terrible thing. Where is Bacè? He must go with you to the castle. Go through the olives, not by the paese. Go quickly and tell the people there not to stir out, but to keep the entrance barred. She must not leave the castle. And Illsboro must stay with her. They had better keep the men-servants watching. They say that they will kill her, the people. And I believe that it is so."

He told her as quickly as he could what had happened. Toinetta's baby was dead. She had put him into the piazza fountain where the other babies were splashing about. But her baby was not strong like the others. He had been playing in the sun and he was hot. It must have been the shock of the cold spring water. He had had a dreadful, quick convulsion, and had died, there in the piazza. Every one had seen. They were saying that the lady of the castle had put death into the water. They said she had killed the baby. He had got Toinetta and the poor little dead baby back to the cabin. Many of the people had followed them and were there with Toinetta, and others had gone to the olives for Giacomo. They would take him to the cabin to look upon his dead little son, and they would tell him that the castle lady had done it. He would be crazy with grief. He would go with the men to the piazza. They would show him how it had all happened at the fountain. Many of the men had been drinking and it was so hot. They would try to make him go to the castle. Where was Bacè?

"He has gone down to Colla Bassa," said the Signorina, "and Maria Domenica, I don't know where she is, not in the house."

"I wish I could go to the castle with you," said Vanini at the gate of the garden, "but I am afraid to leave the people. I must go to the cabin to try to stop Giacomo. If only I can keep him quiet. Don't let the lady go out of the castle, Signorina. And, Signorina, take this with you, it can do no harm to have it."

It was a knife he dragged out of his belt. She had not known he carried a knife, but now it seemed as if it were the quite expected thing that he should take it out of his belt and give it to her. "It is as well to have it," he said.

She ran most of her way up to the castle. She met no one in the olive woods. The little south gate stood open, and going in she barred it behind her. She came to the castle along the northern ridge of the hill, through the cypress alley. Léonie came to the door of the castle.

"But milord and madame are out, m'selle."

"Out? Are you sure?"

"Yes, I myself went down with them to the big gate but half an hour ago."

"Where did they go?"

"To the town, m'selle. A girl came to the castle, screaming out something about a baby that was dead. Gianin let her in, and was as excited about it as she was, and let her get to madame. Then madame would go to the village. His lordship tried to keep her from going, but she would go, and so he has gone with her."

The quickest way to the paese was to go through the castle gardens and down past the lavatoio. Florida thought for an instant of taking some one with her,

but then remembered that the French servants of the castle were hated in the town, and that any one of them being with her would only make things worse. She could not realize that anything much would happen. The people in the paese would call ugly things to the lady, it would be horrid for her, but Illsboro would be there. Probably by this time it would be over and she would meet them coming back up the path. She held Vanini's knife close against the folds of her skirt. She was ashamed of having it, it seemed so dramatic and absurd.

Then down past the lavatoio she heard a sound so horrible that she thought she must be imagining it. She remembered somebody's once telling her that on the stage, to make the noise of an angry mob, people in the wings would shout together, "ru-bar, ru-bar, ru-bar," and the sound that came to her from the piazza, in the hot, white glare and deadly stillness, was just that sound. She heard it, growing louder and louder, as she ran down the path by the aqueduct, "ru-bar, ru-bar, ru-bar." The curve of the Via delle Acque brought her round the other side of the church and into the piazza by the church steps. She came on the piazza so, from behind it, and so upon the crowd that filled the square, from the municipio to the fountain, and from Chichetta's door and St. Francis to the church steps.

She sprang up on the church steps and stood above the crowd, which seemed to her to rise and fall, to sink and swell in the piazza, to surge and gather and break, like a little dark angry sea. The "ru-bar, ru-bar" was like the sound of the sea, and rose and fell and advanced and receded. And all the time Socu' Teré, at the top of the church steps, stood against the leather curtain of the doorway, wearing the Signorina's black cloak, for all the intense heat,

and shrieked and shrieked, her shrill voice rising like the cry of a sea-bird, through the noises of the storm.

"Look at that woman," she was shrieking. "Look at her! Look at her face, there is death in her face! Look at death in her face! You need not kill her, you cannot kill her. Do not touch her, I tell you; do not dare to touch her! I tell you, death has her. Death has touched her. She is not yours to touch, she is death's!"

She was pointing down into the crowd, and it was at the castle lady she was pointing. Florida, from where she stood, could not see the lady's face, only that she stood a little way from the church steps, out in the crowd, that surged round her and yet not quite close to her. She was quite alone in the little space the crowd left her. She stood motionless with her head thrown back, looking at something that was happening — Florida did not at the moment see what — deeper in, among the crowd.

"Look at her face!" shrieked Soeu' Teré, who could not see her face from where she stood, any more than Florida could, making the thing, somehow, the more horrible, as if the hag knew without needing to see, by some very strange power, and by the very strangeness of that power was showing the people some horror they drew back from.

Florida looked past the lady to where the lady seemed to look, and saw there, well away, nearly across the piazza, Illsboro's head, tall above the crowd. He was forcing his way backwards through the crowd, away from the piazza and the angry people, and from the lady, left alone.

He used one arm to push his way through the people, who took little heed of him, striking out among them, with the movement as of one swimming, with

one arm, and with the other arm holding, safe from any touch, close against him, a little golden-haired white thing, that clung to him as if it had been saved from drowning in that strange sea.

It was Alicia — Florida could see quite plainly, from where she stood on the church steps, that it was Alicia. She did not wonder how Alicia had come there, or what had happened, or anything; she thought of nothing but that, because of Alicia, Illsboro had left the lady standing there alone in the crowd that raged around her. To save Alicia, he had left the lady to drown. For an instant she, Florida, knew nothing but the one thing which the lady must know, and felt nothing but that which the lady must feel too. She saw Illsboro's face as the lady must see it, and Alicia's hair bright in the sun against his dark shoulder. He was getting Alicia back safely through the crowd to the shelter of the arch of the Via della Porta. In a moment she would be safe out of it all — little sweet Alicia, of whom he thought, for whom he cared.

A woman in the crowd struck the lady, with her fist, in the face, and in an instant Florida sprang down the steps beside her. The crowd pushed them both back to the steps again, like a wave driving them back and up. The lady did not seem to care for any of it, or even to know of it. She was still looking toward the spot where she had seen Illsboro and Alicia. He had got Alicia into the archway and the shadows hid them now.

The hag on the steps all the time was shrieking at the crowd about the lady:

“Don't touch her; leave her for death.”

Florida had an instant in which to see the lady's face, and knew, in that instant, what Soeu' Teré meant. There was no time to be frightened. The

crowd was just one wave now, drawn back, curled to break upon them.

A woman flung herself at the lady up the church steps. A man pushed past the woman, throwing her back roughly, and caught the lady by the shoulders, dragging her down into the crowd — Giacomo. He held the lady by the shoulders, and swung her from side to side, all his hatred in his face, forcing her down on her knees, and holding her by the throat. When Florida got to them his hands were on the lady's throat and he would have killed her had not Florida struck Vanini's knife deep into his shoulder.

He turned on her, flinging the lady from him, and she shut her eyes.

Some one must have held him. She heard voices say, "It is the Signorina; don't hurt the Signorina!" She heard him rage as they held him back from her. All the voices seemed to be crying her name out, some angrily, some reproachfully, some wonderingly: "Signorina, Signorina!"

She kept her eyes shut, not because she was afraid but because it seemed as if she could not bear to see the blood on Giacomo's shoulder.

The lady must have fallen, when he flung her back to turn on Florida, but she was standing by Florida in an instant, and saying to her: "Go away, you can get away now."

Florida turned to her, sick at the thing she'd done, and clung to her, hiding her face against her, from the sight of the blood on Giacomo's shoulder.

She thought that they would kill her with the lady, and that they would never know how sorry she was she had had to hurt Giacomo. She heard Soeu' Teré's voice from above her on the steps, saying to her: "You can't save her, Signorina, you can't save her, for death has her," and to the people: "You can't

kill her, not one of you can kill her, no one of you can kill her, for she is dead. You can't do it, you can't do it, for it's done."

Through all the voices she heard a dog barking. Then she heard Vanini's voice, quite close, above all the noise.

Monna Lia had her arms about her, and held her as if she would protect her, as if the danger were to her, Florida, hiding her own face only from the horror of the faces about them.

Soeu' Teré's scream rose above Vanini's ringing voice: "Let no one move; it's all done. Let her pass."

Florida lifted her head and saw him where he'd come to them in the crowd. Illsboro was with him.

She thought quickly that he must have got Alicia safe into the emptiness of the Via della Porta. She noticed how much taller he was than any man in the crowd. But she knew he could not help. Now it was too late. Nothing, any more, could make any difference. The people threatened him as they let him pass.

She heard Vanini say to him: "Don't speak, don't do anything. You would only make it worse."

Vanini stood between her and the lady and the crowd, facing the crowd.

At other times, she had seen, Vanini had held the people quiet with his voice and his eyes, but now he could not.

The voice of the crowd lifted itself again, and sank, and rose, and the crowd surged forward again, and back, and forward.

Giacomo, the blood pouring down his arm, lurched nearer. Illsboro was between him and the lady in an instant and would have struck him, but Vanini caught his arm, saying: "Don't, there'd be no hope then."

Soeu' Teré cried past them to Giacomo: "You fool, you fool, don't you see that you need n't kill her? Some one else has done that for you? She is dead now, as if her body were like her heart. She is dead, I tell you. I tell you, all of you, that in three days you will stand here in the piazza and see her carried past."

The strange, taut moment of silence that falls always just once, one cannot explain why or how, upon the uproar of any crowd, fell then upon the piazza.

It was deadly still, though the dog barked.

Into the silence Soeu' Teré cried: "Let her go, you fools! Let them take her away! Fools, that you think to rob death of the thing which is his!"

She was a strange enough figure standing there in the Signorina's long black cloak, shivering in the heat, leaning with one hand on her stick and pointing with the other at the lady, below her and before the people, on the foot of the steps.

She did what no one else could have done. She caught hold of the people, and held them for a strange moment. "Look at her face," she shrieked, "see death there, now let her go. Fools, let her go. Would you have death angry with you all?"

"Now! Go quickly," Vanini said. "Go with them, I must stay," he said to the Signorina. "Go quickly."

Soeu' Teré cried out to everybody: "Let her pass, let them take her away, the fine lady who is dead. Let her pass, let her pass."

The crowd drew back. In the strange silence, that seemed to Florida more ghastly than the voices had been, she and Illsboro got the lady away from the piazza and its lulled sea.

It seemed as if the crowd must break loose again behind them. It seemed to her that at any minute

they must hear the roar of it, following them up the path; her ears were full of it, her every sense was strained to listen for the "Ru-bar, ru-bar"; but there came no sound.

Gerrard kept saying: "Mary, let me help you," but she always said: "No, no, I'm quite all right."

Florida was behind them in the path.

Twice Monna Lia turned to her and said: "You poor little thing! Oh, you poor little thing!"

XXXVI

ONLY inside the castle entrance the lady got to the nearest seat, the great carved bench by the guard's room door, and sank upon it, her head falling back against the wall.

Illsboro knelt with one knee on the bench and put his arm round her, to keep her from falling.

"It was horrible," he said. "No wonder you're faint. Don't see how you got through it all. Florida, fetch brandy, quick!"

He held the glass while the lady drank.

"You'll be all right in a minute," he kept saying to her.

The servants came, Gianin weeping, all of them in a panic. Only Léonie was cool.

She held the lady in a position in which she could breathe more easily. After a few minutes the lady could speak. She said she was better. She would go to her room and lie still for a little while and then be quite well.

She sat up and smiled, with all the tragic dimples, at Florida.

"You will stay with me, won't you?" she said, "all the rest of the time?"

In the ghastly nightmare that it all was Florida could only nod to her silently.

The lady wanted to walk to her room, but Gerrard carried her there, and put her down on the bed. She said he was very kind, but she wanted Florida, and she thought the bed was sinking.

Florida, trying to keep her voice steady, said: "No, no, the bed is not sinking."

Léonie brought salts and held them. The lady lay as they had put her down on the bed, quite still, her hands by her sides.

"You 'll be all right in a minute," said Illsboro, standing by her.

"Yes," she said after him, "I shall be all right in a minute." She lay with her eyes closed.

"I've often been like this," she said. "Have n't I, Léonie? And much worse. If it were going to be bad, it would have been bad now. Gerry, it really is n't anything."

"Of course not, but I 'll send for the medico all the same."

"Let Gianin go for him," said Florida.

Gianin was waiting outside the door. Illsboro moved a little toward the door. "Better keep Gianin here," he said. "I 'll stop at the doctor's as I pass."

"Where are you going?" said Florida.

"I must go to the garden house and see what's happened to that poor child."

"What poor child?" Florida asked, having quite forgotten.

It was the lady who said: "The little pretty girl. She must have been so frightened."

"I got her out of the town all right," said Illsboro, "and there was no one in the path. I told her to go back to the garden house. She'd come there to you, Florida; she is in great trouble."

"Maria Domenica will look after her," said Florida; "Maria Domenica must be back there by now. It must be she who told Alicia to look for me in the paese. Was n't she looking for me? She'll be all right. You stay, and send Gianin for the doctor."

"I don't want the doctor," said the lady.

Gerrard gave the order and said, coming back from the door: "Better have him, I'd worry less. What a thing, — oh, what a hideous thing! I'll wait and hear what he says, and then I'll go look after her."

"Go now," said the lady. "It was so horrible —" She shivered, as though with closed eyes she were seeing it all again. "Anything may have happened to her. Do go, Gerry."

"I'll go," said Florida.

But the lady kept her. "No, no, I want you." And Illsboro said: "I won't be long, you don't mind, do you, Mary?" He bent down over her.

There was something to Florida dreadful in his gentleness; it made all things so much worse.

The lady opened her eyes and smiled at him.

"Yes," she said, "go and see if she is all right, that little girl."

"Shall I wait? Would you rather I waited? I won't go at all, if you'd rather I did n't, of course. Only there are reasons why no one can help her except me."

The lady was watching his face, and it seemed to Florida horrible that still he did not understand. He was good and gentle and kind, and it was all so frightfully cruel. It seemed to her that her own eyes were crying out to him very loudly the things she could not say. "Don't you know what you did in the piazza? That you left her in all that just because it was Alicia? And that she understands? And was n't that enough; oh, was n't that cruel enough, without

going on with it, like this? And don't you know, oh, don't you know, that what Soeu' Teré said is true?"

"It is a dreadful complication of things," Illsboro was saying; "no one can help the poor little girl except me."

"I can," said Florida, "I'll go now." She did not know how she could leave the lady, but she knew that Illsboro must not. It seemed incredible that he did not understand. She wondered how she could make him understand. The lady was still watching him.

"Do go, Gerry," said the lady, "I'd rather Florida stayed with me, I would much rather have Florida." She turned her head a little and looked at the girl. "I want you dreadfully," she said, "and nobody but you."

Illsboro bending over her, touched her forehead with his gentle hands. "You're better, aren't you? You're quite all right now?"

"Yes, oh yes, please go, and always be good to her."

It was such an odd thing for her to say that, "Always be good to her." Florida wondered if she knew what she was saying.

"I'll be back at once," said Illsboro, "and you'll do as the doctor tells you, won't you?"

The lady put her hand up and took his hand and drew it down over her eyes and held it so.

"Don't bother about me, I shall be well soon," she said.

"You don't mind my going, Mary?"

"I'd rather you went," she said, "truly. I'd rather be just alone with Florida."

She drew his hand down over her lips and kissed it. "I'm glad," she said.

Florida had a fancy that with his hand she had drawn down over her face a veil that never would be lifted.

Illsboro patted her hand that had fallen from his.

"But go, quickly," she said; "now, please!"

Florida had moved between Illsboro and the door. She was afraid to speak aloud. She caught his arm and tried to send him back into the room. It seemed again to her that her eyes were still crying out to him all the things.

But for him there was only Alicia.

"I'll be back shortly," he said.

She followed him into the hall, but the lady called to her: "Florida, Florida!" and she came back.

"Florida," said the lady, "I want him to go. You see I understand, and I want him to go. But don't you go, you poor little thing."

"I'll not go," said Florida.

"You'll stay all the rest of the time?"

"As long as you'll let me."

"Poor little Florida," said the lady, "poor little thing."

There was nothing to do but wait.

Gianin had difficulty in the confusion of the paese to find the doctor, and it was long before he came, Master Cock, but there really was no need of him. Before he arrived Florida and Léonie had got the lady undressed and comfortably into bed. The marks of Giacomo's fingers were great blue stains on her throat. It seemed incredible to Florida that she should have gone through such a thing and not be far worse than she was. By the time the doctor got there she could sit up a little in bed and talk easily. He, too, wondered at her. There was really nothing for him to do. He stayed and talked for a little. He told them about the paese after they had left it.

Somehow or other the old hag and Vanini together had managed to disperse the people. It was quiet again, or seemed so. Giacomo had not been dangerously hurt.

He did not want to talk much of it for fear of troubling the lady. She must be feeling the effect of it more than she showed, he told Florida. It was marvelous that she had come out of it so easily. He would come back by and by just to look in.

It was sunset time then. Florida opened the blinds and let the smoldering beauty of it come into the room. By dark Illsboro had not come back, and Florida wondered if the lady were thinking of him. She herself was trying not to think of him.

Of course it must have been Marcento. Alicia had probably fled from him and from her mother to her, Florida, who had seemed the only escape.

After a while Monna Lia spoke to her, in the dusk where they were, the lamplight screened from the bed:

"I should have let you go, too, but it seemed as if I could not. I knew she would need you, but I thought I needed you more. I was dreadfully wrong. She needs you for the things that have to do with life, that will perhaps have to do with all her life, and I only need you for death."

Florida shuddered at the word. The things Soeu' Teré had said on the church steps were with her terribly, though it seemed for no special reason.

"You are better, Madonna," she answered; "are n't you better? You are n't thinking of — dreadful things, are you? You are going to be quite better to-morrow, and forget all this? You will let us take care of you, Gerrard and me, won't you?"

The lady only said: "Poor little thing," smiling at her.

It was nine o'clock, and still Illsboro had not come

back. He was probably arranging for poor little mad Alicia to go back to Cannes, perhaps to the duchess instead of to her mother. What else could he do? He was probably talking to her now, telling her — what could he tell her? He would send Maria Domenica with her surely, and he would probably go with them down to Colla Bassa to get Pascà and the carriage.

“He will drive with them himself into Ventimiglia,” broke in the lady, following her thoughts as if she read them. “I ought to have let you go, to be there instead of Maria Domenica.”

“I would n’t have gone,” said Florida. “Do you suppose, for a thousand Alicias, I would have —” She stopped short, because the very thing she was going to say she wouldn’t have done was just the very thing that Illsboro had done.

The lady said: “He will not be back till nearly noon to-morrow.”

The night lamp burned on the floor in the corner. The room was full of blue shadows that stirred softly. All four windows were open and the night came in. It was a deep blue night; the frogs sang very loudly, as before rain. All the odors of the garden came in with the sultry breeze; all the stars were out, but to-morrow, one felt, would bring rain. The thought of tomorrow made Florida wince, as if she were afraid. From where she sat by the bed she could see out of the window the tops of the orange trees; the towers of the cypresses; the wave crests of the hills, all dark against the great stars. In the peace of the night, the terrible thing that people made of life seemed to her more than ever terrible. The thought came to her that the paese people might come to the castle in the dark, a crowd, in the dark, with lanterns and torches, and the light on their faces, and their

voices drowning the sounds of the night with that "Ru-bar, ru-bar." But the thought seemed no more terrible than all the rest of it. Gerrard's going was the worst of it. She grew sick at the thought of it, as she had been when she turned from striking the knife into Giacomo's shoulder. She wondered if the castle windows and doors could be safely fastened, and if the servants were in great panic. She wondered what Vanini was doing. It occurred to her that there might be danger for him, but the thought did not in the least frighten her. She remembered how frightened she had been for him that day, in the winter, of the morra trouble, but now it did not seem to matter at all.

Master Cock came late and found no reason to be anxious about the lady. It had been scarcely an attack, he said. "She will be herself in a day or two." He said of his own accord that he would like to spend the night at the castle. It would make the Signorina less anxious, he told the lady; he would sleep as he had that other night, on the sofa, where he could be called, though he knew they would not have to call him. "Vanini is downstairs," he said to the Signorina, when he could speak to her out of the lady's hearing. "He is going to stay to-night, too. He did not want me to tell you, but I thought you would be glad to know it, Signorina. Of course nothing will happen; the carabinieri are watching the gates, but you know how little that means. And there might be trouble, especially as the Signore does not come back."

In the lady's room the quiet and orderliness seemed unreal in the midst of the horror of these things. Léonie finished whatever there was for her to do, and went out of the room to wait where she could be quickly called.

The lady said to Florida: "Come quite close, you poor little thing, and stay all the while."

Florida sat on the floor by the bed and laid her cheek against the lady's hand on the coverlet.

"I'm glad you're here," said the lady, "and that he went, and about all of it."

That was all she said, except, after perhaps an hour's stillness, moving her hand to caress Florida's cheek with a cold, little tired touch: "Poor little thing, I leave with you, and nobody else in all the world, the burden of remembering me."

It was perhaps an hour after that that something in the way the lady began to move her hands on the coverlet frightened Florida and she called the doctor.

For a long time afterwards she could not bear to think of that night, though in time it came to her to love the thought of it. They did all they could do, but hopelessly. It was terrible. And yet it was the last memory she ever gave up, of all her memories. For Monna Lia had known all the time that she was there, and had looked to her, though she had not spoken again.

At one time in the night there was a confusion of sounds, though Florida was scarcely conscious of it, and was annoyed that the doctor stopped for an instant, in something he was doing, to listen anxiously. Afterwards they told her that Settinella and some of the roughest of the paese men had come with ugly threats to the castle, but that Vanini had managed them, somehow.

She remembered afterwards having heard his voice outside among the other voices, and having said to herself indifferently that it would be all right. She was more conscious of the clamor of birds just before dawn. There was a nightingale that sang wonderfully. At dawn the castle lady died.

XXXVII

GERBAED came back soon after, in the rainy dawn. Florida met him, as she had that other morning, in the corridor. Gianin had told him. He would have her go with him into the room. There, she went over and stood at the window, looking out into the rain. She counted the columns of the pergola under the window. There were twelve columns on either side. She counted them over and over. She remembered all her life that there were twelve columns on either side of the pergola.

She stayed on with him at the castle; there were all the things to do. Maria Domenica came and stayed there, and she and Léonie helped Florida do all the things. Illsboro could do nothing. Vanini stayed with him most of the time. When Florida spoke to Illsboro it was never of the lady, only of this or that little sad thing that there was to do. She saw nothing of Vanini. He had been so far away from her thoughts that she wondered at the sound of his name. He seemed now to matter so little. Probably, if things had not happened as they had, that night, she would have gone away with him over the line into the gray world. And yet she only felt as if it were a thing that might have been, but was not, in some very far dim time.

Within three days, as Soeu' Teré had told them, the paese people stood on the church steps to see the castle lady carried past. They buried her just outside the cemetery, against the wall under the cypresses. The reverendo read what he might of the office for the dead.

Florida went back with Illsboro to the castle, and stayed on there with him for several days. There was

so much to do, and she had to do it, for he could not. He was dull and stupid. He could not bring himself to touch the lady's things — the little mute things, left behind when she had gone so far — and could not bear that any one else but Florida, who most had loved her, should touch them; — the little things that had been hers, that were left, it seemed, — as always it seems, — so strangely, when she was gone, things that had known her touch, and all mutely, terribly cried out of her.

After a while Illsboro went away. She had not asked him anything about Alicia and he had not told her anything. She did not know when he was going, or what he meant to do, and she did not think about it. He would have her go with him the last time into the room of the four windows, but they did not talk of anything.

When all the last things were done, and he was gone, she went alone through the rooms in which so much of her life had been lived, and which she should never see again, never forget.

Vanini waited for her, walking up and down the terrace. The lady's chaise longue was not there any more, nor the green cushions with the black lace veil lying tossed down upon them. Gianin came to say good-bye to her at the great stone entrance door where he had met her, turning to her from his lemon pots, those months ago, when she came for the first time to the castle lady. There was a red sunset and the light of it was burning hot upon all these fever things.

XXXVIII

THE Signorina and Vanini went down the path together for the last time. The red of sunset had

burned itself out of the sky and of the world, and the half light was upon things. There were two or three women still at the lavatoio. One of them spoke to the Signorina — it was Chichetta — but she did not hear. She passed among the people in the piazza scarcely knowing they were there. Under Chichetta's window she stopped and looked up at St. Francis. She had a thought of him that she was to keep all her life with her. It was that of all the people of the world he had been the happiest, the most honored, given his master's wounds and pain to bear. For surely life's supreme honor was to bear, the supreme happiness to bear rapturously.

"One has the wounds," she said to Vanini, "to carry, for love, always, in memory."

Vanini said to her: "Yes, my Signorina, one has the wounds. And, my Signorina, there are for us our brother the sun, and the sister moon, and the stars and the wind, and all the creatures of our Master."

"And you have the Bride Poverty," she said.

When they passed Giacomo's cabin they were both thinking of the beginning of their friendship, the night when they had fought together against death, who had been driven away only to come back again in a little while. She wondered, perhaps he did too, if *that* were to symbolize the futility of all struggles. They both remembered how they had stood together drinking Maria Domenica's coffee at the cabin doorway, in the triumph of that first morning.

"Poor Maria Domenica," said the Signorina, wearily pushing the hair back out of her eyes; "she and Bacè thought I had come back to be their little nurse-child again, the birricchina, the little lamb. It is not only just tragic, Vanini, it is pathetic."

He did not answer. They were both silent all the

rest of the way down the path, where they had walked together in the great wind of that long past morning. They did not even speak to one another at the gate of the garden house, where Vanini kissed the Signorina's hand, and where he stood, long after she had gone in, long after the light went out from the window of the room from which she would be gone to-morrow.



PART III



I

IN one week it was as if it had all been a thing she had dreamed.

Some day Illsboro would come back from wherever it was he had gone, and marry the little Alicia; Florida would meet them everywhere, and he and she would look at one another sometimes as they talked of dining at the somebody's, or asked did he or she know the somebody else's, and would wonder the while if ever, really, *that* had been, if really they had seen love and hate and fear and life and death together. But they would never speak of it. They would look at one another—in the rooms, among the people, of the world of "this," and wonder if the world of "that" really had been, but never ask it of one another.

She had tried to tell of it all to Jack. He had been glad to see her, and he had been very "sweet." He had met her at the Gare du Lyons, actually, at seven fifty something of the morning. What had n't it meant to her to see him there among the people on the platform? And what had been the use of its meaning anything? If only they could have jogged "home" in a fiacre, or in the tram, along the quais, she would perhaps somehow have made him understand. But in the motor, with her visiting list in its little pocket, and "Paris par arrondissement," and all the mirrors and bottles and powder boxes that she never used but that spoke of the life of "this" so definitely, she could only tell him, what he very

apparently knew, that it had been awfully good of him to come. If they could have stopped somewhere to breakfast on the way, on a brioche and coffee, and sat together, alone and unthought of and unwatched, in some friendly little shabby corner, perhaps she could have told him. But from the station to the Avenue du Bois the motor took, it seemed to her, just a half minute's flight; the dear, familiar wonder of the streets and the spring and the morning, just dashed through. The Quai des Célestins; those old sculptured houses à mansardes; the streets with their names from the old kings' gardens; Our Lady of Paris, there across the June blue river, that type and symbol of a thing so great in the city's life; the flowers over there, under the tower of the clock, and the strong, dark old mass of the Palais de Justice; the bird shops on this side, a twitter already; the poplars, and the long line of the Louvre; the gardens where kingship is buried, — all were just rushed past with no time for a glance at any of it. Then the swing around to the Place de la Concorde and the Champs Elysées, — of course it was only stupid to feel things, and if one did, unfortunately, feel things one must not tell of them — Avenue du Bois, and the apartment, up on the left; a new concierge, the white stairs with the red carpet, the lift, the door on the second landing to the left, the new butler Manson had engaged, and Manson, perfect as ever — it was all as before.

Jack was going off for the day somewhere with those new people of his. He would bring the little girl back to dine; he wanted Flori to know her. Hoped Flori would just rest all day, — she looked rather rocky. Manson, glad to see her mistress, troubled because she looked ill, but unwilling to admit any of it because she did not approve of personality in

the relation between mistress and maid, certainly knew how to make one most luxuriously comfortable; one could be most luxurious in the rose and gray rooms, and after all one did appreciate a big porcelain tub.

Evelyn ran in for a minute, prettier than ever. When Florida asked about Bob, she shrugged her shoulders and lifted her eyebrows and really did n't know. She had n't seen him in days. He was — Florida might as well know it — making a frightful idiot of himself; quite too impossible; people were beginning not to have him. Florida vaguely remembered that in this world it was the end of everything when it came to that, that people did n't *have one*.

"It's all your fault — all," she said. "You've just let him get to that, Evelyn." Bob had been frightfully nice to her, he had wanted to help her, once, and she wished she could help him. She could n't think very clearly, she was so bewildered, back in all "this," but she said: "Evelyn, do you know what you're doing? It's such a wonderful thing you've got, Evelyn, that Bob gives you. It's about the only thing worth having in the world. And you throw it away. Heaps of women spend all their lives trying to keep a hundredth part of what you are throwing away." But Evelyn had already begun to tell her how some great costumer or other in the rue de la Paix wanted to dress her for nothing if she'd have her portrait by the great painter Some Body or Other, who was getting smarter and smarter, done in a certain special type of dress he wanted to make chic. And that reminded her of a fitting somewhere, and she must rush.

Florida had all the rest of the day to think back and to think forward. But she could not think very clearly, she was so tired. The long journey back

left scarcely more impression than the journey out, — the journey with hope beyond it, out to the Ivory Tower, that now, hopelessly, she had come back from.

Maria Domenica and Bacè had gone down with her to Colla Bassa. No one of the paese knew that she was going, only Vanini, and he understood. It was Bacè who sobbed and besought her. Maria Domenica looked at her with dull eyes, stupidly. Maria Domenica had tried for a thing, tried for a life, once, and had failed. Bacè had never tried, had only accepted. So it was Maria Domenica who understood that this thing was only as it had to be, and Bacè who could not understand. The hot white road before the caffè at Colla Bassa had been empty that day of dogs and babies and chickens, and in the caffè the flies had buzzed over empty tables. The flies had tortured the horses of Pascà's carriage, all the hot, endless way down the valleys, by the dry river and the burned chestnut trees, and through the dust into Ventimiglia. The Ventimiglia station was crowded with emigrants, men, women and babies, and all their world's belongings, waiting to be packed into the train for Havre and the States. They were a tragic lot, waiting there for the frontier train, and the more tragic because they did n't in the least know that they were tragic, but took it just stupidly, and sat dull-eyed, or carelessly, or laughed and quarreled and sang, with no more realization either way of what was before them — the thousands of miles of sea, the strangeness of other lands — than of a tram ride from Naples to Posilipo. Sullen or gay they made nothing dramatic of it; their eyes were as helpless as the eyes of Maria Domenica when she said good-bye to her Signorina. And when the Signorina saw her own face, in the mirror over the opposite seats of the gray-lined rail-

way carriage, it was hopeless too, like that, with the same uncomprehending, indifferent acceptance of whatever came.

Jack's new little girl, when she came to dine, was pretty, but not pretty enough to carry off the tight little thin-lipped air she had of quite owning Jack. "I wish we could get an extra man," she said, as she was leaving, "for to-morrow, and ask Mrs. Marvin to come too, out to Juvisey with us."

"By Jove, I'd forgotten," said Jack, helping her into her wraps; "I think I won't go with you to-morrow, if you don't mind. I think I'll just stay round and see what Florida wants to do."

And Florida did all the things he wanted, and was half happy just to be with him — would have been wholly happy if she had not known so well that she would not have been with him if the little new girl had been only a shade prettier. They lunched at Laurent's in the Champs Elysées. Evelyn was there, and Captain Marley, lunching with the duchess and a lot of people, but not Bob.

The duchess insisted on their coming to her table. She would have Florida sit by her.

"You're looking frightfully interesting," she said. "What's been happening to you? What happened to you in that crazy place? Have you ordered your clothes yet? Let me go with you when you get them, and I say, I'll make a ripping success of you. I see just how to do it." She put up her lorgnon and stared at the girl, near as she was to her. "The right sort of clothes make an armor, my dear," she declared; "and a weapon and a snare and a what-d'ye-call-'em all, d'ye see, to fight with, and hold and defend with. Stop nibbling almonds and eat your chicken."

"Your letters were so kind," said Florida. "Will

you be like that, like the letters, — oh please, — for me? ”

“ Eat your chicken,” said the duchess, and talked on as if carelessly; telling things that did n’t matter. She was the one person, Florida felt, who could tell those things. It seemed Alicia was in Paris with the duchess at the Bristol. She had gone to her — Illsboro had told her to go to her — instead of to her mother, after that flight of hers. And the duchess had made a joke of it all, and laughed it into so slight a thing that there could have been nothing but a laugh if any one had come to know of it, — a laugh turned rather unexpectedly against Mrs. Temple-Vaulx. Illsboro had written something to the duchess, and the duchess had told something to Alicia, and something to Alicia’s mamma, and the mamma had agreed that Marcento had better be cut, and that they’d better wait, just wait and see. And that was the end of what might have been rather a horrid little scandal. Alicia, hard yet against her mother, had come with the duchess to Paris, and was rather “ run down,” it appeared, and under the care of Doctor somebody. She’d been every day, the duchess told Florida, to the apartment in the Avenue du Bois, to ask when Florida was expected; and when yesterday they told her she was come, had not asked for her, had just gone away, and it seemed, for some reason, she would n’t come any more. It seemed, for some reason or other, she was afraid. Florida asked, would n’t the duchess tell her to come to tea to-morrow? She did n’t want Alicia to be afraid of the things that were coming to seem so far away. She must see Alicia, and the things that were almost unbearable to say must be said, and then there would be only to go on. It would be “ funny ” to be talking again to Alicia — such an odd repetition.

In the meantime, late in the afternoon of the day she and Jack lunched with the duchess, there was another curious repetition. Bob came. He had not known till he met Marley an hour ago that she, Flori, was back. He was very awkward, wondering what she had heard of him. Jack was there. They were just going out to tea, the two of them, alone, to the Pré Catelan. Florida urged Bob to go with them, but he would n't. He looked as if he'd never slept, and his eyes would not meet hers. Florida wanted to say: "Let's stay and have tea here." But then Jack would have gone without her. There were so many women who'd have liked to go with him to tea at the Pré Catelan: he could have just stopped on the way and picked up almost anybody. She wanted very much to see Bob, but to-morrow Jack was going to the races, and next day there'd be something else, and it would be long before she could have tea just alone like this with him again. She said: "You'll come another time, won't you, Bob? Won't you come just any time to-morrow? I shall be in at any time. I do so much want to see you."

He would n't promise, but said, "Good old Flori," and stood to watch her go off with Jack in the motor.

At tea with Jack in the green and gold June woods she was thinking all the time of things Bob might have said, that she might have said, if they'd taken hold of that moment, and of how such a moment might never come again. Perhaps he had needed her, as long ago he'd wondered if ever she might need him, and perhaps she might have helped him as he had always wanted to help her. She wondered if she'd always have to remember him standing there, not at all counting in it, looking after the motor. He had meant much to her, and perhaps she had failed of her chance to mean something, perhaps rather much,

to him. The memory of her walk with him, that last day at Haunt's Manor, came back to her more strongly than ever, through the time since. He had made up for his lack of bread with — she scarcely knew what things of earth. And were the things *right* that she 'd made up her lack with? She questioned it over and over, while Jack poured her tea at the little table under the locust tree. No answer came to it. She 'd filled up her lack with knowledge of hunger and cold and sickness and sin and death, and love and pain and hate, of helpless, hopeless *not understanding*, and she 'd come back from her Ivory Tower, from its wide view upon sacrifice and suffering and labor, just to live for it, that Jack might call her his little girl while he put the lemon in her tea. What did it matter, any of it? She thought of her talk with Alicia; it seemed such ages ago. What had Alicia come to, by the far-off road that had crossed her road at just one strange point? Tomorrow she would see Alicia. She would see her just because the duchess had made it seem the only thing to do. She wondered what they would say to one another, and she did not especially care.

II

BUT when the time came she did care. Alicia made her care. She was such an unexpected Alicia, not just the little white pansy girl any more, but a woman who had seen and understood, who had felt very deeply, who sooner than she should have, in her girlhood that was meant to be free from care, had come into the heritage of pain. Florida saw it in her face as the butler held the curtains back for her, and sprang up to meet her in the gold and white room,

though she could say nothing to her. They stood in the middle of the gold and white salon, and the butler looked at them curiously as he slowly dropped the portières.

"I thought I should never see you again," said Alicia, and flung herself into it, just standing there. "I could n't bear things, and I was afraid to kill myself, and then your letter came. And I thought and thought. You had got away, and I tried to, and it was terrible, Florida."

"Yes," said Florida.

Alicia's tragic little face comforted her, somehow. If Alicia could care like that, perhaps she'd understand, perhaps she'd think kindly of the woman one could n't have known, and let Illsboro remember her kindly, and make him happy, as the castle lady would have had it. An Alicia who could suffer like that must be worthy the wounds.

"It was terrible," she said, "but it's over now."

"Yes," said Alicia, "it's over now."

"Come sit down," said Florida, "there by the window; shan't we? It's such a nice window; one sees all Paris motoring past, and smells the green things too, and the summer. What a ducky dress, Alicia; where'd you get it?"

Somewhere the duchess had taken her, said Alicia; did Florida really like it?

The man brought in tea, and they watched him arrange things, going through with it all placidly, inevitably, as Manson had gone through, while they watched that night long ago, with the laying out of the things her mistress should wear down to dinner. When he was gone again they neither of them thought of tea.

Alicia went on, as if she'd come to know how little other things mattered: "It's over now for me."

Florida, I only half understand. They said horrible things about her — her, you know; but he loved her, and you did, and I shall think of her always as of one who must have been just — not understood — by every one except you two. Would she have hated me, Florida? ”

“ Oh no, no, a thousand times no. The last thing she said was that she was glad about everything, you, and Illsboro, and that day in the piazza, your having each other to turn to, and her own — going away from all of it — everything.”

“ I’ve been unhappier about her,” said Alicia, “ since I saw her that day than about any of it. Of course I had n’t known where he was, where she was, if they were together, anything. I just went to you, and all of it was there. I saw her face. Out of all the confusion — Oh — I saw her face — ”

“ I can’t stand much talking of it, Alicia,” said Florida.

Alicia came to her chair behind the untouched tea-things, and bent and hugged her silently. Anyhow, as it all went on, they would have a queer little intense bond of silence between them. Alicia went back to her chair and talked of another thing. Suddenly it seemed as if she were older than Florida, and wiser, and could explain, and help.

“ It’s over, for her, forever. And it’s over, the worst of it, of all my life, for me, Florida. But, for you, it’s beginning all over again. Please let me talk, Florida; don’t mind, I’ve simply got to tell you. I’ve seen such lots of men since that night we talked in your room there at Haunt’s Manor; do you remember? All sorts of men. I’ve been just put up for them to stare at. And I’ve seen them. You’ve never seen men like that, Flori; you’ve never been just put there in the midst of it for such a dreadful

seeing. 'And I know things you don't know. 'And I've come to understand. Listen, Flori, and forgive me, won't you, if it seems odd of me to say?' She put her hand on Florida's, leaning toward her and looking at her very lovingly and pleadingly and earnestly, as if she were the one who knew, the one with whom it lay, from greater knowledge, to give help. "And out of my experience of other men," she said, "I've come to know how good Jack is, how the little lightness is all clear to see through, and so clean, and how it's lovable, Flori, lovable. If one can only come to see it for what it is, and think of him as a child, and of what — a little — hurts one in him as just a dear half fault of his, that one can love him all the better for because it's somehow pathetic, and gives to one's love of him a need of taking care, a little sense of protection and defense. Oh, don't you see? Please see. Nice men are such children. One's just simply *got* to think of them like that. And not mind any more than mothers mind. The whole of it, all there is of hope, is in *not minding*. These are things one simply can't say, — only, Flori, don't you know?"

"Yes, I think I know," said Florida.

Then the curtains opened and Jack came in.

"Hello, Flori! Why, Alicia, how nice to see you! Flori, I brought you some gardenias. And the man at that library down the quai — what's his name — said you'd like this book. Do you, Flori?"

As it happened he had no thought of Alicia. But that was only as it happened. Hard memories came to Florida, and oddly enough it was Alicia who drove them away. It was not by anything she said or did, but just by the way she did not mind Jack's seeing how the sadness in her little face had whitened and lined it and made it almost plain, and by the way she

turned to him, just fond of him, and seeming to rely just on the something very good, as she had said, that, under all the lightness, was there, and that made him take her into the best of his sweetness when he said: "Alicia, you know, tell me if that old, dirty book really is the sort of thing she likes."

III

LAST night at the opera the duchess had been very sharply and glitteringly a woman of what one calls the "world," but this morning, in her room at the Bristol, sitting in a window on the Place Vendôme in the full morning sunlight, she was just the poor, little old soul that let Florida see all the scars the years had made for her. She had n't her wig on, only a black lace scarf thrown over her own soft gray hair, and she wore a white muslin wrapper that her maid would have scorned.

"I used to think of you," she said, "so much all winter. I used to think of you when I was in funny places,—in the rooms at the Casino when I was playing high, and in all the crowd at people's noisy parties, and especially when I looked into that intense afternoon blueness, don't you know, of the East, and there 'd be a white sail so still in the blue sea, and a white cloud, and I knew how beautiful it was, and I knew you 'd know, and I wondered if you 'd ever find what you 'went out for to see.'"

She had made Florida take off her hat and gloves. "I want to pretend you are going to stay for a long time," she had said. "Tell me things, about your winter, way off."

So the duchess could pretend too, thought Florida. For answer she showed Maria Domenica's

letter, which had come that morning, and which she had been carrying about in her card case because it was all she had, except the scars, to make the winter seem as if it had been. "There's all of it," she said.

The duchess could not read Italian and Florida translated: "The Signorina is gone. Eight days, eight centuries. I have sent the Signorina's books. I cannot bear to go into the room that is empty of them. Vanini is gone, no one knows where. There is an illness in the paese, the doctor knows its name, and little Pippo is dead of it. The gardens are dead in the heat and drought. I can find no flowers at all to put upon the grave of the castle lady. But some day there will be narcissus, and I will put them there, Signorina, for thee, my own most dear, whom my heart follows to the farthest places."

"That is my old nurse," said Florida to the duchess; "I could not love her enough. Her house is my only home, but I could not love it enough. There was an air castle, but I could not 'make believe' enough. I was of use, really, among the poor people, but I could not love them enough, nor the town where I might have made myself have a right to be. I loved her, the castle lady, Mary Talbot, you know, who is dead — but I could be so little to her. She could not love me enough. I loved Vanini, — oh, so much, — but not enough. And I shall never hear of him again. He will die of just a bad cough some day, somewhere, and I shall not even know of it. I would have given all I had, — except the love I could not give, and followed him, — if things had n't happened just as they did happen. And now I shall never hear of him again."

She sat with her hands clasped before her looking at the duchess, and said twice over: "I shall never

hear of him again." She waited a long time for the duchess to speak, and the duchess waited a long time for her to go on.

"Do you know that I understand?" said the duchess at last.

"Yes, I know," said Florida.

"Once," said the duchess, "I had a vision and a dream. It's really funny. There was a man who was very poor, d'ye see, and I was disgustingly poor. I thought we'd be poor together, and not mind. But he did mind. He did what he did, and, because I could see nothing else to do, and because I did n't care anyway, having cared too much and, being done with it, I did what I did. 'Et là, c'est l'histoire.'"

Florida got up and went to the window. "I love the Place Vendôme," she said; "the symmetry of it. How gay it is with the crowds and the sunlight!—I suppose every one's history is like that. One just does what one does."

"You're crying," said the duchess.

"Yes, is n't it funny? All winter I never cried. And then one time I cried so much that I thought I never could cry again. It was the night I told Vanini that I would go away with him. He had said he was going to kill me. And I tried to kill myself. And it was fearfully hot, and the smell of the lilies was terrible. I sat in the grass by the lilies and cried, and I thought I never should cry again, and I have n't. Not when she died, and not when I said good-bye to him."

"Go on and cry," said the duchess, "and I'll tell you something. Everybody, once in his life, does one thing of which everything that happens to him afterwards is the consequence. My thing was when I turned from the man who would n't be poor with me to take riches. Your thing was when, in some hour

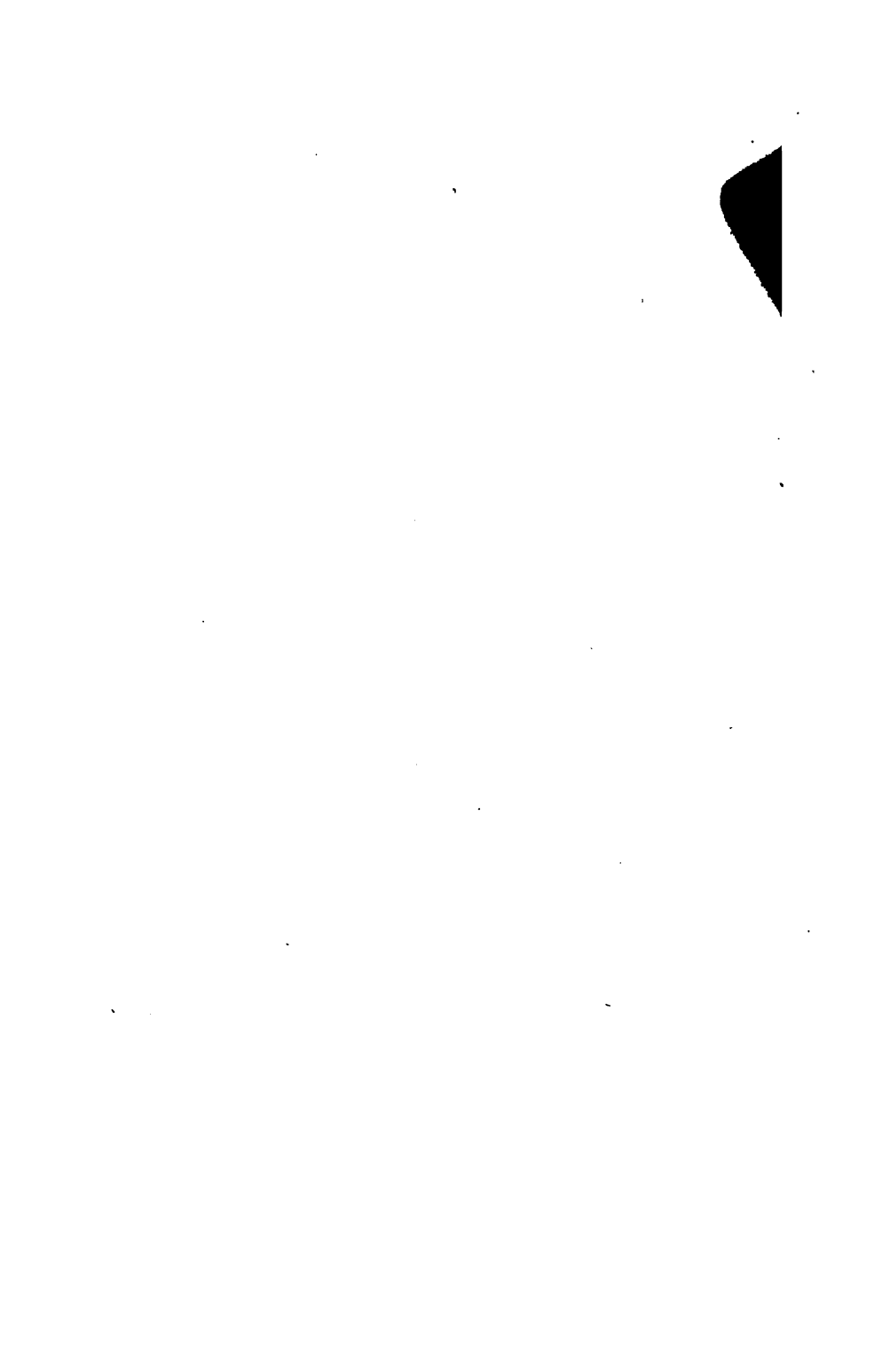
I don't know of, you fell in love with the man you married. Whenever that hour was, you can't get away from it. Suffering did n't get you away from it, and the long journeying did n't get you away from it, and in the Ivory Tower you were n't away from it, and you could follow no other love away from it. But you've got a thing of your own whatever happens you. All your life's the consequence of that hour, and the things of your life are cruel to you. But, child, you've got knowledge of things beyond these. When you go out from ballrooms you have the stars. There's a frightful lot of confusion and bother in the rooms, but afterwards you go out, and there are the stars; or the market carts are coming in down the Champs Elysées, or in the rain you may catch fragrance of wildernesses."

There was a knock at the door and the man said: "Mr. Marvin, your Grace," and Jack came in.

"Thought I'd come to fetch you, Florida," he said. "We're lunching at the Ritz," he added to the duchess.

"Oh," said Florida, without turning, "I'd forgotten, and I'm so shabby."

"Never mind," said the duchess; "you're so different looking that your being shabby is chic, positively. I say, Jack Marvin, bring her over to London for the rest of the season, and I'll see she gets the sort of clothes she ought to wear. I'll trot her around and show her to people, and make a ripping success of her. — She'll go in for all that sort of thing, d' y' see, and you'll never know why."



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